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Scottish Bird News

THE QUARTERLY MAGAZINE OF THE SOC

No 80 Jun. 2006

Wildlife Crime Pelagic Cruise

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On Saturday 29th April, another free pelagic cruise took place in the series organised by Sergeant John Simpson and Constable Kenny Stewart, to highlight wildlife crime and promote partnership between ornithologists and the police. This year, John has excelled himself and organised five cruises, of which this was the first.

Departing as usual from the MoD facility at Greenock, at the slightly later time of 9.30, we were hardly out of the dock when a couple of Sandwich Terns graced us with their presence, rapidly followed by four Black Guillemots. Eiders and Gannets soon followed, the Gannets diving in the distance before we turned the corner round Cloch Point. Although wildlife was a bit thin "on the ground" this early in the season, there were several Seals and Porpoises, and the usual Guillemots, Cormorants and Shags. These were supplemented by the less usual Puffins and Razorbills.

The weather was sunny, and although there was a cold wind, yours truly spent almost the entire cruise at the sharp end, waiting for suitable photographic opportunities, and being fed suitable titbits by his ever-attentive wife, there being no time in a photographer's life to attend to such minutiae for oneself, as the viewfinder has to have priority over eating! Approaching the island, a Golden Eagle and a Buzzard were seen soaring over the peninsula above the Cock of Arran.

Arriving in Lochranza, we disembarked, and the Arran Natural History Society joined the MV Oronsay for a short cruise in Kilbrannan Sound, during which a Great Northern Diver was reported. Greater Black-backed and Herring Gulls gathered on the water to the west of the pier, feeding in a small area just offshore - near to what was perhaps a sewage outfall? The excellent Sandwich Station was patronised by several people for lunch, as due to the later start, there was no time to go to the distillery on this occasion.

On the return trip to Greenock, a flock of Gannets was seen on the water off Bute, and a few Kittiwakes flew past. The way back was punctuated by the antics of Guillemots, diving to escape at the last minute as the boat threatened to run over them. More Gannets were diving off the Cloch Lighthouse. A last minute view of

Passing Toward Point, Bute and Arran beyond (David Palmar)

Black Guillemots in flight greeted us as we approached the dock around 6pm, and another pelagic cruise was over.

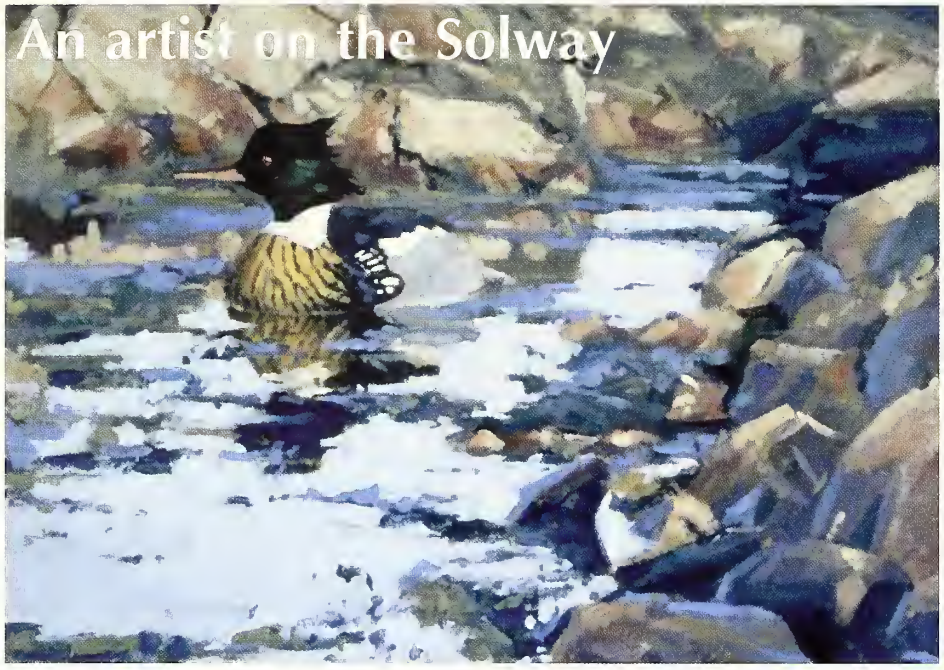
SOC members are making full use of these enjoyable cruises – next dates are 22nd July, 19th August and 16th September. Further enquiries, please contact kennystewart43@hotmail.co.uk.

David Palmar
www.photoscot.co.uk

Gannets against Kintyre (David Palmar)

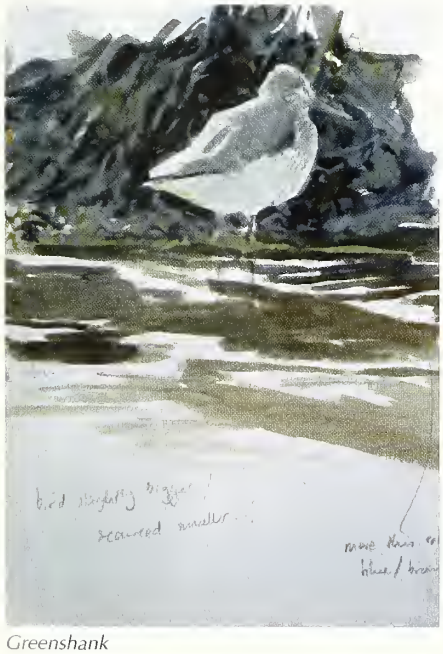
SHOUT
SHARE
IT

An artist on the Solway



Red-breasted Merganser

John Threlfall has been painting seriously since 1990 but admits to not enjoying art at school. He lives in Rockcliffe on the Rough Firth in sight of Hestan Island and within the East Stewartry Coast National Scenic Area. Its tidal nature and light-filled skyscapes create constantly changing patterns that are a permanent source of inspiration. The seasonal movement of waders, wildfowl and other birds adds considerable interest.



Greenshank

Born in Bolton in Lancashire, moving ultimately to Sheffield with his parents, he was always a lover of the great outdoors. Following a degree in geochemistry at Liverpool, John worked summers for the British Geological Survey and winters as a ski instructor in both the Cairngorms and the Alps. At this time he was a member of Sheffield RSPB Group where he was first introduced to the special qualities of the Solway with its wintering migrant birds. During one summer surveying in Galloway, he was taken to meet the late Donald Watson and was impressed by not only his art but also his great humility - Donald asked John for his opinion on a painting that he was working on of Kestrels that he felt "were not quite right". At this poignant time the memory is very strong.

In 1995, John was asked by Jack Fleming to produce a mural in the only hide (as it was then) at RSPB's Mersehead Reserve. It remains an excellent example of his style and enhances the visit for new and returning visitors to Mersehead, together with his murals in the new hide. John remains indebted to Jack, Eric Neilson and particularly Ray Hawley for their encouragement in various ways at that time. During the early nineties, John was influenced by the very nature of the Nith estuary looking east from the lower slopes of Criffel - he talks of the entrancement of open skies, the changing light, mood and tides. John became a part of the young professional wildlife community locally, which included Judy Baxter; a ranger for NTS based at Rockcliffe. John and Judy expressed their appreciation of Galloway in a Spring wedding in Castramont Wood at Gatehouse of Fleet, a SWT reserve of great beauty.

Bullfinch

John at work on Rockcliffe beach (Brian Smith)

Living so close to the shore at Rockcliffe has allowed John to move easily from the use of his telescope and sketchpad "in the field" to his studio. The spontaneity and energy in John's work reflects not only his love of birds and all wildlife but also his appreciation of the environment that they occupy. John will refer to his excellent library where he checks details where necessary. I find his paintings of rocks a joy and am pleased that any visitor that has seen John's "Ravens over the Rough Firth" has enjoyed the experience. Recent times have seen John practising his art in a variety of ways: commissions, illustrations for visitor centres, interpretation boards, leaflets and cards. Organisations using his work include Dumfries and Galloway Council, NTS, RSPB, WWT and WWF. He has also been teaching an evening class on "The Art of Seeing", plus giving talks on "Wildlife in Art". John was an award winner at the National Exhibition of Wildlife Art in 2001 and 2004. He has been selected to show at the Society of Wildlife Artists Exhibition and at Christie's Wildlife Art Sale.

Ravens over the Rough Firth

Being a bibliophile will result in adding to his collection of books at least one that will contain his own pictures and text. This is planned for release in the summer of 2007. Like Donald Watson before him, John is an active member of the bird-loving community. I trust that his interpretation of the landscape and wildlife of this and other parts of Scotland will be enjoyed by many more people in the years to come.

Brian Smith

Scottish Bird News No 80 June 2006

Edited by
Jimmy Maxwell
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Contributions for the next issue of *SBN* should be submitted not later than 25th July 2006 to:

***SBN* Editor, SOC, The Scottish Birdwatching Resource Centre, Waterston House, Aberlady, East Lothian EH32 0PY.**

Articles can be sent on disc or by e-mail (mail@the-soc.org.uk), although we do still accept typed or handwritten material.

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NEWS & NOTICES

200 Club

The latest prizewinners are – **February: 1st** £30 M. Nicholl, **2nd** £20 Dr. Cullen, **3rd** £10 M.Holling. **March: 1st** £30 R.C. Welland, **2nd** £20 I.Balfour-Paul, **3rd** £10 Mrs. Pyatt. **April: 1st** £30 W.M. Morrison, **2nd** £20 J.S.Wilson, **3rd** £10 I.M.Darling.

Please note that the "new year" starts in June and new members would be very welcome. They must be over 18 and Club members. Please contact Daphne Peirse-Duncombe at Rosebank, Gattonside, Melrose, Roxburghshire TD6 9NH.

New SOC members

We welcome the following new members to the club: **Ayrshire:** Mr W Frame, Mr J D MacDonald, **Borders:** Mr D E Aldous, Mr M Rafferty, Mrs L Shek & Family, Mr & Mrs H W Tasker, Mr A J Tucker, **Central Scotland:** Mr P A J Ferns, Mr A C N Rogers, **Clyde:** Mr J Hannah, **England, Wales & NI:** Mr R Moran, Mr D Shackleton, **Grampian:** Ms I Soehle, **Highland:** Mr G Hamlett, Ms C Seymour, **Lothian:** Mr B D Allison, Mr A Arthur, Mr D J Brayford, Miss N Carlyon, Mr & Mrs D Clark, Mr & Mrs L Crawford C.A., Mr & Mrs M G Donaghy, Miss A M Harper, Mr C Howden, Ms S Jury, Mr & Mrs K A Lloyd, Mrs J B N Marshall, Mr B McNeil, Mr & Mrs B Mercer, Mr A Mitchell and family, Mrs S Moffat, Mr M T Moffat, Dr D J Morse, Ms J Muller & Ms G Hynd, Mrs C Peters, Mr & Mrs S Quinney, Mrs S Rogers, Mrs J M Salt, Ms E J Sloan, Mr J Ross Stewart, Mrs S D Vick, Mr W J Whatmore, Ms J A Wilson, Mr & Mrs J Woodhouse, Mr R Alan Young, **Stewartry:** Mr & Mrs G Colbenson, Mr J Hull & Family.

Recorder Co-ordinator

Dr Clive McKay was appointed to this post, starting on the 1st April 2006. Clive has a lot of experience, both in the field – research on Eiders and Chough and various reserve warden and habitat officer posts for the RSPB - and in collating and writing up results before becoming self-employed as an Ecological Consultant and Farming and Wildlife Advisor from September 2003. In his various jobs he has had to liaise with farmers, landowners and local communities, as well as being responsible for data capture from a wide range of monitoring projects including annual breeding, wader, Hen Harrier and Marsh Fritillary surveys, WeBS counts and arable bird surveys. He already knows some of the recorders and has worked with them in the past. He is based in Angus with his young family but still has a house in Islay. His enthusiasm for the job and his knowledge of birds and computers make him the ideal person for the position.

The post is part-time for two years and is half-funded by the SNH. His job is to meet with the 20 local recorders and some of their key observers, and to collate all the records from them onto a suitable data base, which is compatible with the NBN (National Biodiversity Network). At the moment, recorders submit records gathered from lots of observers, and some write local Bird Reports, others send them to HQ and some just keep them until they are required for Scottish Birds. Most are on some kind of spreadsheet format and one of Clive's tasks is to try and synchronize these onto a suitable data base. The NBN covers the whole of Britain and SNH are really keen to gather as much information as possible on to it. There was a definite lack of bird records on the NBN for Scotland, and so this post was created. Once the format and mechanism is in place, it should be fairly easy to co-ordinate future years of records. It is envisaged that after 2 years, there might be funds available to put all the previous years' records on the same data base. We wish Clive all the best in his new job and hope that he will meet many of you over the next two years.

Janet Crummy

The Golden Plover Award

The Golden Plover Award

George Waterston's pivotal role as one of the fathers of modern Scottish ornithology was recognised during RSPB Scotland's centenary when he posthumously received the Society's 'Golden Plover Award'. It seems appropriate that this award should be housed in the building which bears his name and visitors to Waterston House will now be able to see it on display there.

Keith Morton

Derek Ratcliffe

The many obituaries and tributes to Derek have listed his extraordinary achievements. He devised the modern framework for nature conservation in the two volume *Nature Conservation Review;* he made the key discovery about the link between pesticides and eggshell thinning in raptors; he published classic books on the Peregrine and the Raven; he pioneered the description and classification of mountain vegetation in the Scottish Highlands; he led the battle to save the 'Flow Country' (a phrase for the far north peatlands devised by Derek) from afforestation; and he wrote defining books on places as far apart as Lapland, Lakeland and the Highlands. He was a colossus, an enigma and a guru, and even featured in *The Sunday Times* as one of a hundred people who had most influenced the 20th Century.

But, what was he like? Well, as those of you who met Derek will know, he did not dress, speak or behave as if he was important. No, he was quiet - reserved even - courteous, shy, unassuming and modest. He shunned the limelight, sometimes enduring hours of meetings without saying a word, and was often sceptical.

Most people who knew of Derek would use words such as 'respected', 'original', 'dedicated', 'scholarly', or 'mentor'. And indeed he had a claim on all of these, but somehow he was much more in the round. He wrote beautifully, a skill he inherited from his mother- a teacher of English and French. He observed nature acutely and analytically- influenced heavily by the brilliant Cumbrian naturalist, Ernest Blezard. And he thought about the plight of nature, wrote about its place in society, and constantly urged people, especially raptor workers, to rise up in its defence.

And it is here that we begin to understand what drove Derek. He hated injustice; he believed absolutely in fairness, and never ceased to be infuriated, and I mean infuriated, by the destruction of wild places, as well as wildlife, for political gain. Derek was driven by a desire to understand the place of plants and animals in nature. He was obsessed with plotting nest sites of Peregrines, Ravens and Golden Eagles, and grappling with why some parts had higher densities or more productive populations than others. It was the same with plants, especially some of the ferns and mosses, whose distribution he just had to understand. And as it dawned on him that human influences were at play in shaping much of the pattern he observed, he became aware of the need to tackle some of the problems head on; to stand up and be counted, as he put it so often.

Derek Ratcliffe *(Des Thompson)*

Derek had a photographic memory of most of Britain, and certainly of the uplands. Name a location, and he could describe the habitats, the intricacies of the ecology, and much of the birdlife- and often the history of Peregrine or Raven site usage. He loved to capture the beauty of nature in photographs, but really these were small snapshots of his unrivalled knowledge.

When at the desk writing, he produced manuscripts which were word perfect and based almost entirely on what was in his head (reinforced by detailed notes made on the evenings of long days in the field). He was a supreme observer. His industry and energy were remarkable, driven by a thirst for knowledge, and an urge to set the record straight. And what we got was an outpouring of facts and information assembled in a logical and fascinating way. Derek drew you into the wilds of Britain, and revealed elegantly the hidden wonders of what was there to be discovered.

In the field he was special company and at his happiest. He rarely worked in the field alone, instead enjoying company and the banter that went with it. You could be with Derek for hours without exchanging a word, yet it seemed as if you had been communicating all the time. There was a rhythm to his presence in the field; he always seemed so perfectly in tune with his upland haunts.

And what fun Derek was to be with. I was 10 years old when I first went in the field with him and by 11 was clambering down over crags, attached to an old hemp rope, to check the nests of Peregrine and Golden Eagle. Invariably the rope would be too short, and the evening light would be fading, but Derek would shout encouragement whilst holding the rope in one hand and spying through his trusted binoculars for the next crag to check! He could be restless and fast; driving with him I first experienced 100mph in his old Triumph Stag! Once out of the car he would be raring to go and if he had to chat with a landowner or keeper before heading off, you could sense his palpable desire to get going as soon as eye contact was lost. Derek could be seized with ideas regarding places to check. Once, I spent two hours with him watching over a site for a homing Greenshank, on the express instruction of Desmond Nethersole-Thompson not to budge until the bird was seen returning to its then unfound nest. As time passed Derek declared he was bored and thought we should go and check an eagle eyrie; we did, and saw an eaglet in the nest. But the sound of a Greenshank about to go on its nest, a mile away, was the portent to a lambasting from DN-T. In Derek's words afterwards, we had deserted our post and were duly court martialled!

All of us who have studied or just enjoyed raptors have been influenced by Derek. He was the founding father of the systematic, national survey of widespread raptors, based on territory-by-territory checks. He was the first to think critically about factors influencing the patterns of distribution in numbers of raptors, and the role of food and nest sites as limiting factors. But above all, with his penetrating and broad knowledge and understanding, and personal commitment, he effectively led the nature conservation movement in the 1970s and 80s, laying the foundations for the wildlife legislation and protected areas we have today.

One of Derek's most important scientific papers, entitled 'Thoughts towards a philosophy of nature conservation', published in *Biological Conservation* in 1976, ends with a deeply revealing statement:

"The magic of the natural world beckons and challenges, and lures the receptive soul ever onwards but, like the Holy Grail, it is never finally found and possessed. And this is its fascination."

I think Derek did find the magic of the natural world, and for his journey we are greatly in his debt. As time marches on, I hope that like me, you look forward to seeing the name Derek Ratcliffe turn into a legend.

I am grateful to Professors Ian Newton and Colin Galbraith for discussions regarding Derek's work on raptors.

Des Thompson, Principal Uplands Adviser, Scottish Natural Heritage

Dave Allan

Many of you who have visited or phoned Waterston House since the start of the new year will have seen or spoken to Dave Allan. Dave is a familiar face around the area, having worked for the East Lothian Council Ranger Service, based at Musselburgh lagoons. Since he left the Ranger service, he has been busy with surveys and bird recording in the area. He helped with the move from Musselburgh to Aberlady, volunteered at Waterston House and was appointed to the staff in January 2006.

He works part time, 3 and a half days, including week ends. With Keith Macgregor, he has organised guided walks which have proved very successful. He has been instrumental in keeping the Donald Watson Gallery looking forward with different exhibitions and he takes great pride in keeping the building running as smoothly as possible. He is an excellent ambassador for the Club, and all visitors receive a warm welcome from him. We are very happy that he joined the staff this year.

Janet Crummy

Bryan Nelson MBE

Long-standing SOC member and Galloway resident, Dr Bryan Nelson, was awarded an MBE in the New Year honours list, for his ornithological work, especially on boobies. The award reflects a long career of research in many parts of the world. Assisted by his wife June, he has studied seabirds, but especially Gannets and their relatives, and has published numerous papers and books on these species. The MBE acknowledges this enormous contribution to scientific work on seabirds.

It was a visit to Ailsa Craig as a boy in 1953 that first prompted Bryan's interest in Gannets. He studied zoology at the University of St Andrews and moved on to complete a D. Phil. at Oxford, studying Gannets on Bass Rock. This three-year sojourn followed his marriage to June in 1960, and each summer they lived in a hut on the island. Following this, they went to the Galapagos to study other boobies, and for one year camped on an island with no contact with the outside world – except for a visit from the Duke of Edinburgh, passing by on the *Britannia*! The island theme continued with a detailed study of Abbot's Booby on Christmas Island in the Indian Ocean. Threatened by phosphate mining, Bryan's work helped to ensure that a large proportion of the forest nesting habitat of this very rare seabird (only 2,300 at that time) was designated as a National Park by the Australian government. In 1968, Bryan moved from tropical islands to the desert, trying to establish a research station in Jordan – until growing Middle East tensions forced an early departure.

Moving back to Scotland, he became a lecturer at Aberdeen University until 1982, and the seabird research theme continued. In 1974, he took part in a major expedition to Aldabra, an uninhabited atoll in the Seychelles, and home to many thousands of seabirds, including frigate birds. Only by chance were the expedition members able to leave, as their original ship had broken down. Not deterred, further work on seabirds followed in New Zealand. In 1982, Bryan retired and he and June moved to the Stewartry, though there was more work at Bass Rock and three more visits to Christmas Island to supervise further studies. They also became involved in the setting up of the Scottish Seabird Centre at North Berwick, and they are both Honorary Directors.

Bryan has published eight books, starting with *'Galapagos – island of birds'*. The most recent is 'Pelicans, Cormorants and their relatives', published by Oxford University Press (and reviewed in SBN 79); a work that took 15 years to complete. It marks the latest achievement in an extraordinary career, and one that has contributed much to ornithology in Scotland and across the world.

With thanks to 'Galloway News' (19 January 2006) for some information.

Ian Francis

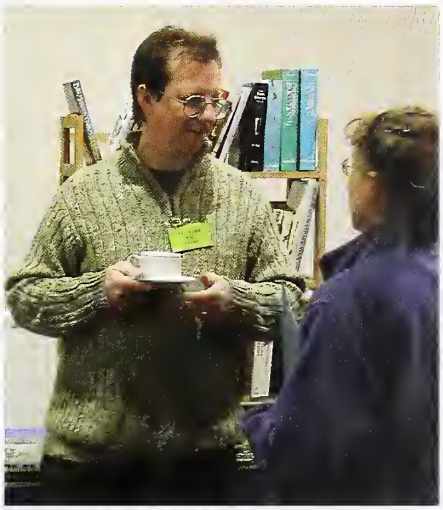
In Memory of Major Alastair David Peirse-Duncombe (1923–2002)

At a short ceremony on 22April, Daphne Peirse-Duncombe planted a rowan tree in a prominent position in front of Waterston House in memory of her husband. Alastair was Secretary of the SOC from 1969 – 83 and Acting Secretary from 1988 – 89. He was also Asst Hon. Sec. 1977 – 80 and Hon. Sec. 1980 – 83 of Fair Isle Trust. In 1989, he started the SOC 200 Club which has so benefited the SOC and which is now run by Daphne.

Daphne at the tree-planting *(Keith Morton)*

Scottish Birdwatchers' Conference – 18th March, 2006

This year's joint SOC/BTO venue was the superbly appointed Western Infirmary Lecture Theatre which is part of the University of Glasgow. The 128 delegates met to enjoy coffee and conversation in the spacious Entrance Hall and to explore round the various stands. A notable addition this year was David Palmar's bird photography (www photoscot.co.uk) display – a magnificent splash of coloured images as one entered the area. Soon the day's lectures began following the theme "Bird Conservation Counts", starting appropriately with Chris Waltho, Vice President of SOC and Chairman of Clyde Branch.



Chris Waltho (SOC Vice-President) chats with a delegate at the SOC stand *(Jimmy Maxwell)*

From Bird Counts to Birds Count – *Chris Waltho*

The Conference opened with Chris 'Eider Man' Waltho's excellent and entertaining overview of local survey work. Whenever and wherever we bird watchers are out and about, we must be asking ourselves the following questions:

What? Where? When? How many? Doing what? How? Where from? Why?

AND, pass the answers on to our Local Recorder on a regular basis. Daily counts, monthly counts, WeBs counts; continuous and accurate recording has produced data bases that provide input into environmental impact studies, planning enquiries and protection area applications, as well

as to SOC branch reports and BS3. Chris showed data from Eider counts at Rhu/Coalport, Redshank counts from the Inner Clyde, Capercaillie counts from the Loch Lomond islands, and Bean Geese on the Slamannan Plateau. Tetrad atlas work was illustrated with data for Meadow Pipit, Swift, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Sand Martin and Garden Warbler.

The speaker explained the classification system for Birds of Conservation Concern [red, amber, green] illustrating the flexibility of the system. Species A, amber status, recent decline, turned out to be SOC membership figures, while species B, clearly growing, of no concern, green, was BTO membership! Bird counts are vital to Local Biodiversity Plans, to Sustainable Development Plans, as indicators of Scottish biodiversity and as input into land use planning.

After a short commercial for the SOC - remember it is an amber species - the audience was urged to use the real time facility of Bird Track Online [BTO] which makes recording painless, giving local and national access to all the answers resulting from asking the questions set at the start of a very professional presentation.

Michael Thomas

The Canna Seabird Crisis
- Bob Swann

Bob outlined the geography of Canna, an island some 8km long by 2km wide with steep cliffs an important feature, and highlighted the importance of its breeding seabird colonies. He explained how the Highland Ringing Group had been monitoring these colonies for 36 years and had been able to show that for all but one of the nesting species, serious declines had occurred over the past decade. The worst was experienced by the Manx Shearwater colony, which fell from 1500 pairs to only 1 or 2 pairs. Population reductions of 16 to 62 percent were observed in Fulmar, Shag, Herring gull, Guillemot and Razorbill. The exception to this trend was the Kittiwake, which showed a 40 percent increase. The declines on Canna far exceeded those on adjacent islands and the species mainly affected were those nesting in burrows or under boulders. Inaccessible nesters such as Kittiwakes on cliff ledges had actually increased. Research showed that the prime cause was predation by Brown Rats, which had increased due to milder winters. Because Canna supported internationally important seabird populations, it was granted SPA status, and EU Life funding was gained for a major eradication programme. This involved setting up bait stations throughout the island and checking the outcome. The bait used was chosen so as not to affect raptors. Eradication has been a success and measures are in place to prevent rats returning by, for example, bait traps at the ferry terminal. In concluding his engrossing talk, Bob said that Canna was once again a safe haven for sea birds but that they faced further serious threats such as lack of fish noted in the 2005 season.

Bob Swann *(Jimmy Maxwell)*

John Reid

Delegates were then invited to make their first attempts at the usual ongoing Identification Quiz, which this year involved recognising tiny fragments of well-known species. Then coffee, and time to catch up with friends before the morning's programme continued.

Hen Harriers and Heather
- Iain Gibson

This talk described a survey of the Hen Harrier population on the Renfrewshire Hills, emphasising the role that heather plays in the Hen Harrier life cycle. This was clearly illustrated by a map featuring nesting areas in the northern part of the survey area, whereas the southern part was virtually clear. The former comprised a heather moor while the latter was grassland.

Threats to the species were identified, predominately generated by man. Being a Red Grouse moor, keepers may destroy nests in an attempt to reduce perceived predation on grouse chicks and maximise numbers for the gun. Heather burn is an accepted practice to assist in replacing old tough heather with young shoots. While controlled smallish areas are acceptable, large areas are not so easy to control and simply reduce the available habitat. Another facet to burning is the destruction of invertebrate life forms - reptiles, amphibians and small mammals. It is also suspected that developers wishing to construct windfarms may trash the area prior to an Environmental Impact Assessment being carried out.

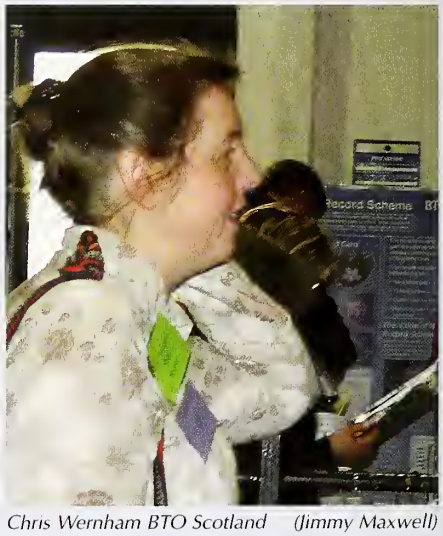
Males tend to return to the moor first coinciding with, or shortly after, the arrival

Iain Gibson SOC Clyde Branch *(Jimmy Maxwell)*

of the Meadow Pipit. The females come ten to fourteen days later when they check out the food supply which if short, governs clutch size. Prey items being brought to the nest can be identified with some difficulty.

The presentation concluded with fox predation shown by four stills, edited from CCTV footage (see *SBN* 77). These showed a fox dining on three chicks, the only survivor being the runt of the clutch which bravely resisted the attacks.

Frank Fleming



Chris Wernham BTO Scotland *(Jimmy Maxwell)*

Rising to the Challenge of Raptor Conservation - *Chris Wernham*

At very short notice, Chris undertook to fill in for Des Thompson and give his presentation. This was a very ambitious and rather delicate task to fulfill considering Des would have come at this from the SNH angle whereas Chris is firmly established as Head of BTO Scotland. To emphasize the complexity of the set up one should understand that seven individual organisations - BTO Scotland (British Trust for Ornithology), SNH (Scottish Natural Heritage), SRSG (Scottish Raptor Study Groups), RBBP (Rare Breeding Birds Panel), RSPB Scotland

(Royal Society for the Protection of Birds), JNCC (Joint Nature Conservation Committee) and SOC (Scottish Ornithologists' Club) - make up the Scottish Raptor Monitoring Group of which Des is chairman. However Chris with gusto and abandon and obvious extreme familiarity started to throw these titles and acronyms about, then, rather to the relief of the audience, gave a systematic account of the group's objectives, progress, achievements and data so far committed to publication. One has to admire breadth and scope of this project - raptors being the most intensely studied creatures in Scotland. To fully appreciate the importance of this data, a quiet room and several hours of careful study are required.

Campbell McLellan

Keith Macgregor and Dave Allan man the SOC stand (Jimmy Maxwell)

Lunch now followed, served comfortably among the exhibits in the Entrance Hall – and this time generally applauded for its variety, quality and quantity. The afternoon's lectures then got underway...

Counting your eggs before they hatch - *Dave Leech (BTO)*

Dave sprang upon the post-lunch audience, ringed (as befits a BTO man, but in the ear) and enthusiastic. He told us all about the BTO's Nest Record Scheme (NRS), of which he is head. With a wary eye on Chris Waltho's 5 and 1 minute cards, he rattled out statistic after statistic. 85 million pairs of breeding birds in UK (he didn't say how many of these were Pheasants!). Scotland has 94% of Sand Martin breeding records, 100% of Manx Shearwaters and 8% of volunteer recorders. Nest-recording is easy, tips given, please help. All now put on IPMR database. The scheme is closely tied to the BTO's Ringing Scheme and provides data on factors influencing population -

Dave Leech (centre) BTO, with the technicians (Jimmy Maxwell)

immigration/emigration, productivity and survival. Annual trends produced, problem species flagged and factors affecting productivity identified. In 2005, Mistle Thrush, Skylark, Spotted Flycatcher and Starling all suffered reduced brood sizes. Pied Flycatcher and Redstart showed higher failure rates with colder temperatures. Rainy weather reduces Peregrine and Willow Warbler success. Barn Owls breed less well after cold weather.

There are target ranges of species, eg those nesting in the open - larks, finches, warblers, which have generally declined; and those nesting in holes, eg tits, which have increased. A cartoon showed that a bird in the Land is not better than one in the Bush. If you wish to take part please email records to nest-records@bto.org , and the NRS website is www.bto.org/goto/nrs.htm. All in all, a rattling good lecture.

David Merrie

The Solway Serengeti - *Dave Fairlamb*

This clearly presented and well illustrated talk took us from the wilderness of Arctic Svalbard to the extensive green plains of Galloway. The entire population of Barnacle Geese, one of only three separate

Dave Fairlamb RSPB (Jimmy Maxwell)

populations in the world, winters in the Solway area at Caerlaverock. This population has been studied intensively since the 1950s and thanks to a series of both bird and habitat protection legislation, has grown into a sustained flock of 27,000 individuals. Both ringing projects and field work have shown that this rapid increase is tapering off as proportionately fewer juveniles are produced each year. There appears to be a high survival rate in adults and the limiting factor may finally be the size of the breeding grounds.

The impact that the Geese have had on the Solway has been varied. By attracting many birdwatchers to the area the geese have provided incomes for many hotels and tourist-related industries, particularly helpful to them during the quieter winter months. Much of this success has also been down to the local farmers, many of whom have gained financially due to the presence of the geese. The new partnerships between conservation bodies, shooters, SNH and the farmers have lead to the geese being seen now as a cash crop and not a nuisance.

This very positive and optimistic talk was both lifting and enjoyable.

Iain Livingstone

John Clark RSPB (Jimmy Maxwell)

Volunteering Counts for Bird Conservation - *John Clark*

John Clark then continued the theme of volunteer counting for conservation by giving a personal account of his experiences as a volunteer and explaining how this had eventually led to a career with the RSPB. As information officer at the RSPB Lochwinnoch Nature Reserve, John is currently involved heavily with

environmental education with, among others, 2000 school children visiting the reserve in 2005. John's ability to communicate with large numbers of people was obvious from his excellent presentation. From early beginnings with the YOC (now RSPB Wildlife Explorers), he described his own past experiences as voluntary resident warden at various reserves, pointing out that a knowledge of birds was not the only skill required. Wardens are expected to manage habitat and liaise with farmers, as well as dealing with visitors and working in retail. Some wardens organise 24-hour surveillance at sensitive sites. They are also involved in WeBS counts, Breeding Bird censuses and the RSPB's Volunteer and Farmer Alliance which has successfully been extended to 275 farms during 2002-2005. John explained his work on the expanding skua populations while volunteering on Handa Island, afterwards visiting Foula to continue the associated fieldwork. He showed how the Handa colony of Arctic and Great Skuas had become established and explained how the consequential predation of the Great Skuas was affecting the Arctic Skuas.

Norman Elkins

After a brief coffee break, the last speaker continued...

Monitoring Waterbirds: The Wetland Bird Survey – *Graham Austin*

Graham, leader of the BTO's Wetland and Coastal Ecology Unit, described how three species of WeBS person may currently be seen on the fringes of coastal, estuarial or inland waters, all likely to be in weather proof clothing and equipped with telescope, binoculars and notepad. None should show webbed feet, but their confidence in handling data from WeBS websites should be apparent.

Graham Austin BTO *(Jimmy Maxwell)*

Core WeBS have been winter visitors for half a century, mostly from September to March, and generally seen on the same day once each month. Some 3,000 are around, predominantly beside estuaries and large inland waters. Efforts to attract more to exposed shores and ponds are in hand. Their major successes are in spotting avian trends such as the spread north of Little Egret and Whooper Swan increases.

Low-tide WeBS have appeared within the last 10 years, mainly in November to February, surveying the relative popularity amongst different avian species of various coastal dining areas, some 20% of the study sites in all. The preferences of Avocets versus Oystercatchers on the Exe, for example, were such specific knowledge as might inform an environmental impact assessment for a proposed development.

NEWS are a recent phenomenon, to be found on rare one-off occasions in winter months seeking non-estuarial wetland birds which may have been overlooked by the estuarial-loving Core WeBs predators. Much more is now known of the Turnstone since the NEWS appeared.

Over the last three years the BTO has introduced WeBS Alert, a device which flags high [over 50%], medium [25-50%] falls in numbers and medium or large increases in a priority set of avian species. Much effort using what is known as Biological Filters goes into exposing real information from background noise. Fluctuations in Bewick Swan populations, for example, are normal and may not justify an alert; changes in Mute Swan populations would be significant. The switch of the stable Knot population from west to east coast sites has not required an alert.

Graham encouraged us all to look on www.bto.org for the WeBS data on our local sites. Preferably we should become a WeBs person too, even if our chosen water holds few or no birds or we are mere casual visitors.

Henry Martin

The day's Quiz produced two winners in David Bates and Gordon Jamieson and runners-up in Jimmy Maxwell and Iain Livingstone. After prizes were dispensed, Janet Crummy (SOC President) drew the Conference to a close with appropriate thanks to everyone involved. An EGM followed...

Janet Crummy (SOC President) with John Simpson and another delegate *(Jimmy Maxwell)*

EGM

The main reason for holding this meeting was to ratify the 2004-5 SOC accounts, and this was duly done. Dick Vernon then gave a concise account of the present financial situation of the Club and was then re-appointed as SOC Treasurer. The appointment of a new auditor, Sandy Scotland CA, followed. The only remaining business lay in the proposed constitutional changes affecting membership of Council. These changes are designed to greatly increase SOC Branch participation in the affairs of the Club. Chris Waltho helped to explain the changes which were then discussed and finally agreed by the meeting. Branches will receive appropriate advice and put the changes directly into practice.

Full marks to SOC Clyde Branch for joint-hosting this excellent day Conference with BTO and ensuring that the theme, "Bird Conservation Counts" avoided most of the risks associated with statistical aridity by variety of speaker and skilful technical presentation – a really enjoyable day.

Jimmy Maxwell

Some RSPB Investigations - a good year for surveillance?

We hear again from the team who in the RSPB are most involved with active protection – we learn about some of the procedural difficulties they experience as they investigate wildlife crime and seek successful prosecutions.

On 17th February at Stonehaven Sheriff Court, a former gamekeeper on Dinnet Estate, Deeside, was fined £500 for offences involving a Hen Harrier nest on the neighbouring Crannach Estate. On the night of June 25th 2003, Marshall was filmed by a team of RSPB Investigations staff as he left his landrover carrying a shotgun, climbed over a fence onto Crannach and began to stalk a recently fledged Hen Harrier for several hundred metres across the hillside. At one point he was seen to aim his shotgun at the bird but did not shoot.

This prosecution was the end point of a very successful period of work for the Investigations Team in 2003. When Marshall finally changed his pleas to guilty half way through the trial, this brought to an end a period of unprecedented legal activity, which, due to worries over prejudicing later hearings, was necessarily played out away from the public gaze.

Given the well- known high levels of persecution of birds of prey (see decades of RSPB annual reports and recent SNH papers on golden eagle persecution), it was decided in the late 1990s that an attempt should be made to film persons attacking a bird of prey nest, preferably a Hen Harrier – as the species with the highest known level of persecution at that time. An early attempt resulted in the prosecution of a head gamekeeper in Morayshire, who was filmed shooting a recently fledged harrier on the ground - he received a £2000 fine at Elgin Sheriff Court in 2001.After this success (and clear backing of the legal system by this result), we continued to try to show that such persecution is widespread.

At this point, without going into detail for obvious reasons of security for the future, it is worth pointing out that such work is not easy – in addition to the rough terrain, harsh weather in the open, and long hours of waiting; there is the ever present worry of equipment failure, birds nesting in the "wrong place" and just plain bad luck to contend with.

In 2003 we had a particularly effective and experienced team working on the problem. Our first breakthrough was a tip-off, that a particular nesting Peregrine which had endured a long history of deliberate interference, was likely to be attacked imminently. After a relatively short period of waiting, the local gamekeeper, John Macleod (41) of Haystoun Estate near Peebles, was filmed clambering across to the nest, removing the single Peregrine chick present, putting it in a sack and walking off. The police arrived within minutes but the bird was never found.

Macleod was charged and the usual lengthy court proceedings began – ending in a trial at Selkirk Sheriff Court on 24th March 2004, where Macleod was found not guilty on the charges relating to the Peregrine chick, but was fined £300 for leaving a gun and ammunition unlocked in his vehicle at the time of the incident. Sheriff Farrell agreed with the defence submission that the RSPB evidence was inadmissible, as they had entered the estate without the owner's permission, intending to obtain evidence of a crime (a very short précis of two hours of legal debate!). Although the RSPB discussed the matter of an appeal by the Crown, against this decision – which of course could have wide ramifications over the reporting of all crimes on open land – no appeal was forthcoming.

Peregrine chicks in defensive position - first successful fledging for years from this Peebleshire eyrie, the year after the filmed nest robbery (George Smith)

The third surveillance job carried out by the RSPB, concerned a grouse moor, known variously as Hopetoun Estate, Leadhills Estate or Abington Farms Ltd, lying in the Lowther Hills in South Lanarkshire. With a shocking history of persecution of Hen Harriers and Peregrines in particular, but with harriers still attempting to nest each spring, this was seen as an important target. On 30th April 2003, a local underkeeper, Gary Ford, walked up a small valley to the vicinity of a Hen Harrier nest site being watched by the team. In addition to filming this man "finding" the harrier nest by throwing a training bag for his dog into a patch of heather; he was also filmed picking up the dog, a Labrador, by the throat and kicking it to the ground. He was later charged with a cruelty offence after SSPCA officers, a vet having viewed the film. On the same night, a group of men using torches arrived at the nest site, shot the female bird and removed the eggs. One of the RSPB team followed the men back to the roadside, where he took their vehicle number. The vehicle was found to be used by the estate head keeper, William Steel, while a shotgun cartridge found at the nest matched the gun of his son, William Steel junior. Steel junior was later charged by the police, in relation to the killing of the harrier and destruction of the nest.

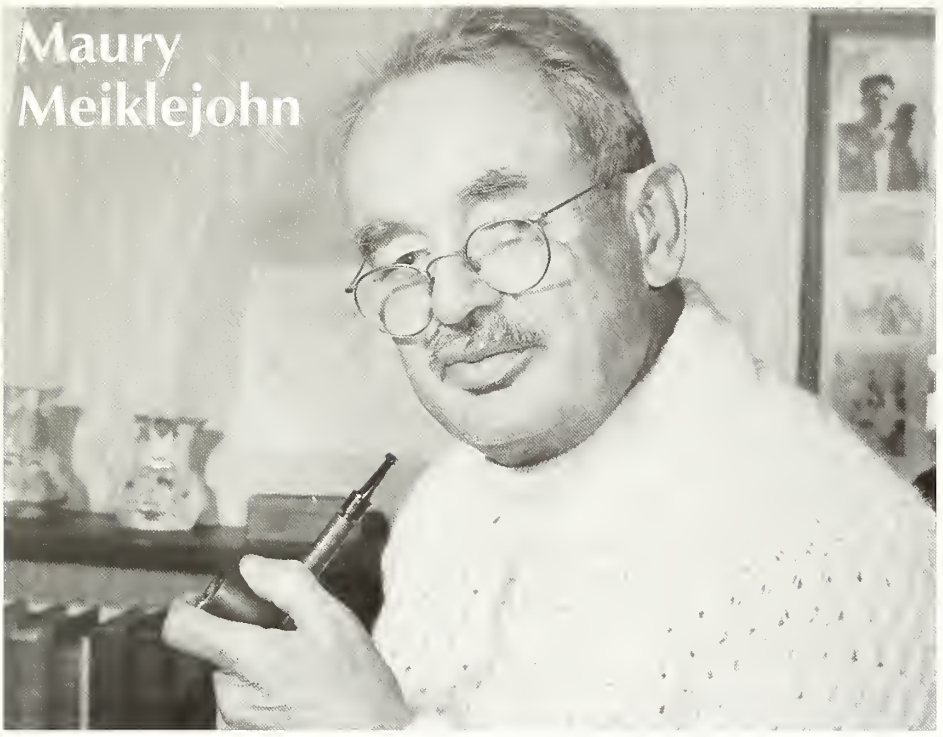
Again a lengthy court process began. By the time of the Selkirk result, this case was still unresolved – it dragged on for many months after that, until finally, all charges, including the cruelty charge, were dropped by the Procurator Fiscal. We believe this was partly due to worries by the Crown of a repeat of the Selkirk decision.

A few months before the Stonehaven court decision, Investigations staff were involved in yet another "interesting" court case – this time at Aberdeen Sheriff Court. In July 2003, a member of the team was following up an allegation of crow cage trap abuse when he came across a "snare line", containing many rotting animal corpses – including Badgers, Foxes and a Roe Deer. The police were called and the local gamekeeper Stephen Harmson was charged with snaring offences. When the case came to court in 2005 the defence lawyer (the same person involved in all three cases above) attempted to run the "RSPB on land without permission" argument again. Sheriff Cowan saw no problem with our presence on open land - the trial continued and the gamekeeper was convicted and fined £600 on 19th December 2005. At the time of writing, we believe that an appeal by the defence is pending; however, this is now not thought to apply to the question of access to land.

In conclusion, we now have two sheriffs who have stated that they see no problem with hearing evidence obtained by civilians (RSPB staff) going on to open land for that purpose, without landowner permission. There is also the Ross case at Elgin where a guilty plea was entered without recourse to such an argument. The Selkirk decision now looks to be the "odd one out". Moving the discussion away from of the strict letter of the law, members of the public who have become aware of this situation, have repeatedly said to us that they cannot understand how a member of the public can be barred from telling a court about a crime, just because the landowner has not given permission for that person to be there. Surely, it is in any landowner's interests to have criminals apprehended and dealt with by the Courts?

Dave Dick, Senior Investigations Officer, RSPB Scotland

Maury Meiklejohn



Maury Meiklejohn *(Image courtesy of The Herald and Evening Times picture archive)*

To continue our retrospective series, which looks at great Scottish ornithologists within living memory, we now feature Maury Meiklejohn (MFMM), one of the best-loved characters ever to grace the Scottish ornithological scene. The following is drawn from several already-published pieces and extracts written by those who knew him well.

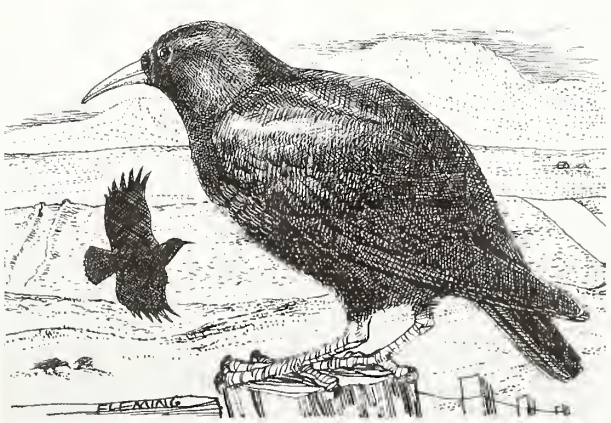
Maury Meiklejohn The man – early beginnings (Donald Watson)

For a man to become a legend in his own lifetime he must have exceptional qualities. Maury Meiklejohn, who died in Glasgow on 14th May 1974, was such a man. He was most widely acclaimed for his wit and erudition, but his countless friends from all walks of life may remember him most of all for his genuine humanity. As a contributor to the enjoyment of ornithology, through writing and talk, he was unequalled. How fortunate we were in Scotland that he came to Glasgow in 1949, just when the SOC was gathering momentum after the war years. He joined the Club at once and was elected to the Council in 1950, becoming President from 1960–63.

Born at Harpendon, Herts. in 1913, he was however proud of his Scottish blood and when near Dunblane, liked to point out the house where his grandmother had lived. From Harpendon, the children went for long country walks with their father, a knowledgeable ornithologist, while their mother encouraged them to identify plants. At Gresham's School, Holt, he discovered the delights of birdwatching on the Norfolk coast and made life-long friends. There at the age of fifteen, he was shown his first Pied Flycatcher by T.A.Coward. At seventeen he won an Open Scholarship in Modern Languages to Oriel College, Oxford, graduating with first-class honours in French and Italian in 1934. Like many young ornithologists of the time, he acknowledged W.B. Alexander as a friend and mentor.

From "the man behind the initials" (Bob Caldow)

After leaving Oxford, Professor Meiklejohn began his professional life as a lecturer in Italian and Old French at the University of Cape Town. In 1941 he enlisted in the South African army, serving in East Africa, Egypt, Palestine and Italy, returning to Britain in 1945. Thereafter followed a brief lectureship with the British Council in Teheran, then three years as Head of the Dept. of Italian at the University of Leeds before his final appointment, the Stevenson Chair of Italian at the University of Glasgow. He was one of the most prominent ornithologists of his time, being a member of the British Rarities Committee, first editor of Scottish Birds (and first Local Recorder for the Clyde Area).



Choughs on Islay *J.B. Fleming - (with kind permission from Mrs. Lena Fleming)*

Professor Meiklejohn lived alone in the west end, fending for himself and achieving a level of competence in cooking of which he was rather proud. No-one however can have been more dispassionate about his sartorial appearance than Maury. Whenever he could manage at weekends, he went off birdwatching by bus or train, thereafter on foot, bareheaded, clad in tweed or donkey jacket, polo-necked sweater and scarf, corduroy trousers and army boots, all surmounted by an enormous pair of binoculars hung around his neck.

Maury once said "I feel that I stand at a watershed between an old age in ornithology and a newer one". After the war, the need to protect and conserve wildlife became increasingly apparent. A more professional approach had to prevail and inevitably ornithology acquired a quantitative, scientific treatment which some older naturalists found difficult to adjust to and accept. Being in the presence of birds Meiklejohn took as a privilege to be grateful for and not to be abused. His first concern was always for the bird and any birdwatcher contravening that concern could expect a reprimand. Prolonged chasing of tired and hungry migrants to get a better view would be one such case. Normally however, Maury was gentle of speech and demeanour and it took time for one to recognise the various strands that went to form his complex character. He loved people and loved talking with them. There must be few men who had such a huge number of friends and acquaintances ranging over the widest spectrum of types. He raised no barriers except where poor taste or behaviour intervened.

MFMM by yon bonnie banks (John Mitchell)

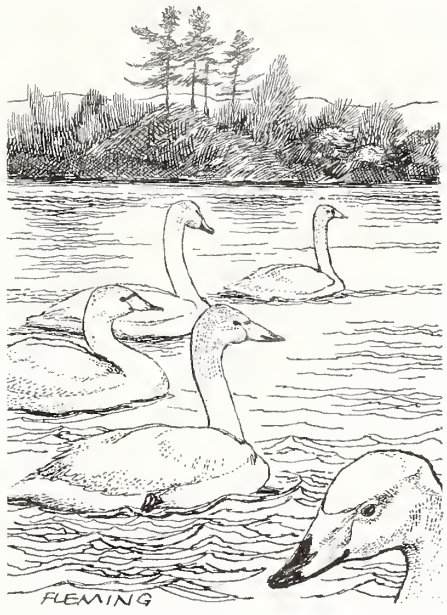
It was D.E.Allen's introductory remarks in *The Naturalist in Britain (1976)* that made me realise just how little we really know of the personalities and private lives of even the most distinguished ornithologists of the past. Despite our heritage of shelves crammed with hundreds of bird books and journals, there is often nothing more than the obituary pages for the biographer to turn to for material. Regrettably, much the same thing will almost certainly be said about the leading ornithologists of our time by tomorrow's naturalist/historians. But there will be the odd exception. For instance, there is almost an *embarras de richesses* in the hundreds of weekly articles written for the *Glasgow Herald* by the late

Professor Maury Meiklejohn. It is all here – his taste in clothes and books, likes and dislikes on innumerable subjects ranging from replenishing the inner man with mouth-watering stovies, to horrid plastic and chrome conversions of country pubs.

Under his distinctive initials MFMM, the first of these articles appeared on Sat. 2nd Jan. 1954. I do not expect that either he or his regular illustrator, J.B.Fleming – referred to by MFMM as 'him what draws the pictures' – dreamt for one moment the series would run for over twenty years. In that time only one prepared article failed to materialise, when the Post Office somehow managed to mislay the manuscript for three weeks. What was thought to have been the one thousandth article was published on 10th March 1973, but, as the author cautiously pointed out, the estimate was based on calculations done on the back of a used envelope after he had partaken of a very large lunch. MFMM's last contribution to behind-the-scenes Scottish ornithology appeared on Sat. 11th May 1974.

Many of MFMM's short pieces form a diary of excursions to his regular haunts, such as the Firth of Forth, Galloway, the Norfolk coast and his native Hertfordshire. But every now and then he would be tempted to chance the weather elements and turn north-westwards from Glasgow in the direction of Loch Lomond. MFMM once confided to readers that his favourite picture on his study wall was a water-colour depicting Loch Lomondside as seen from Strathblane. A reminder, perhaps, of a red-letter day when he triumphantly added a pair of Golden Eagles circling over the Loch to his personal tally of 'birds seen from trains'. Early on a Saturday or Sunday morning would find him sharing a bus with an assortment of fishermen and campers (complete with their indispensable 'paraffinalia') all headed for the promised delights of the bonnie banks. A choice of routes by either the Great western Road to Balloch or over the Stockiemuir to Drymen, MFMM usually preferred the latter with its superb panoramic view of the island-studded loch as the bus reached the summit of the hill.

On alighting from the bus at Balloch, the first spring migrant usually to be pencilled-in to MFMM's list for the year was the rhododendron-loving Chiffchaff, somehow managing to make itself heard above the incessant chorus of Rooks nesting around the entrance to the park. The first Wood Warbler of the season was Loch Lomondside's compelling attraction however and two articles were devoted to MFMM's annual pilgrimage to capture once again the evocative sound of its shivering trill. Upper Millrowan on the north side of the Milton-Balmaha road was his special locality, a small mixed wood "where the sun falls through the leaves of springtime to make patterns of golden coins on the ground below". Alas, this idyllic scene is no more, the grand old wood having been almost entirely clear-felled the year after the second of the two articles on Wood Warblers was published.



Whooper Swans at Loch Lomond J.B. Fleming - (with kind permission from Mrs. Lena Fleming)

Like so many ornithologists, before and since, MFMM found the magnetism of the mouth of the River Endrick quite irresistible. With its reedbeds, marshes, sand-spits and lagoons, no other spot on Loch Lomondside offered such a range of wetland habitats to attract both birds and birdwatchers alike. Gadwell, Spotted Redshank, Wood Sandpiper, Little Gull and White Wagtails ('the largest concourse of these birds I have ever seen in Britain') were amongst the many fleeting visitors to the Endrick Mouth to be the subject of his pen. Despite the area's appeal, MFMM was none too keen on the half-dozen or so large bulls that used to roam Camargue-like over the Endrick Marshes. An understandable reluctance to walk past a couple of these inquisitive beasts almost robbed him of the opportunity to add bird 242 to his 'Scottish list' – a wandering Spoonbill on 3rd July 1971.

MFMM rarely seemed to venture on to the surrounding hills, although he enjoyed the occasional chest-heaving trek (advocated as 'the only known cure for the common cold') into one of the higher glens in search of nesting Ravens. A gentle perambulation looking for 'smallish squeakers' (Goldcrests, Treecreepers, Long Tailed tits and the like) in the hedgerows and waterside alders was more the thing. MFMM's most ambitious walk was undertaken on Sun. 8th May 1955, when he attempted to record one hundred species during a single visit on foot. Seventy-four different birds had already been ticked off when the day decided to end somewhat moistly, and 'pusillanimity' (faint-heartedness – I had to look that word up) set in. This was by no means the only Loch Lomondside excursion to come to a dampish end, with a rather despondent MFMM staring out at the grey waters of the loch, sharing his sandwiches with the gulls and his thoughts with the poets; 'cast your bread upon the waters and you shall find it after many days – and a fine condition it would be in too, all soggy and mildewed !'.

But never fear, by the following Saturday's edition of the *Herald*, MFMM had usually bounced back, his blood perhaps stirred by an exciting vagrant or the sight and sound of Greylags heading back to their nesting grounds in the arctic north. Returning home from one exceptionally sparkling outing on an Easter Sunday, which had produced not only migrating geese against a backcloth of Ben Lomond, but sightings of Garganey and Greenshank at the Endrick Mouth, MFMM found himself in company with a small girl about six years of age – 'she told me she had seen lots of rabbits. "How many?". I asked. "Three", she said. It was clear that this young mammalologist had had a capital day, too!'

There is little doubt in my mind that the most far-reaching influence of MFMM's weekly contributions on the mainly non-ornithologist readership of the *Glasgow Herald* was to give birdwatchers residing in the west of Scotland their first real taste of respectability (...one gets the feeling that birdwatching in and around Edinburgh has always been looked upon as a genteel pursuit). MFMM also had that rare gift of making us bird nuts smile at our own eccentric behaviour. So much so, I have long since forgiven him for alluding to my birthplace – the Soke of Peterborough – as 'a drunken old man who spends his time carousing with disreputable old women known as the Norfolk Broads'.

The Clyde branch booklet "Selected writings of Professor Maury Meiklejohn from the Glasgow Herald 1954–1974" has been out of print for a very long time. A second-hand copy however may be able to be traced by David Clugston (contact him at HQ).

Should any member or others have any personal memories, anecdotes and recollections of Maury, we would be pleased to hear from you. The most interesting would be published in SBN *and all would be retained in the MFMM archive held within the Waterston Library.*

Monitoring Scotland's Rare Breeding Birds

Greenshank - rare Scottish breeder (David Palmar)

BTO Research Biologist, David Glue, urges all Scottish birdwatchers to support the UK's Rare Breeding Birds Panel (RBBP), via the network of County and Regional Recorders, so helping to swiftly detect status changes in our rarest breeding species, and guide remedial conservation measures.

Those fellow older birdwatchers, lucky enough to scan through 50 or more years of diary records and publications, can vouch for a markedly changed UK avifauna. Gone, effectively, are several former breeding 'gems' (e.g. Wryneck, Red-backed Shrike), while others have recently arrived and are struggling to secure a toe-hold (e.g. Spoonbill, Common Crane) and yet more have secured a firm footing and look set to flourish (e.g. Little Egret, Cetti's Warbler). We live in dynamic, exciting times. Indeed, many experienced pundits consider the UK avifauna to be evolving more swiftly today than at any stage in modern times. Scottish birds figure strongly among those under threat. Many of the UK's rare breeding birds exist only in isolated fragments of habitat (e.g. Bittern, Scottish Crossbill), at the fringes of their breeding range (e.g. Greenshank, Snow Bunting), or as re-colonists (e.g. Osprey, Sea Eagle). These vulnerable birds present important 'indicators' of potential change, and their status deserves to be checked very carefully – with all birdwatchers chipping in. Today, the urgency of this role is heightened, placed against the backcloth of global warming, climate change, sharp shifts in countryside stewardship, farming and forestry regimes, fishing quotas, and increasing recreational pressures. Arguably, the policing and scientific roles of the UK's birdwatchers have never been greater. SOC, and BTO members alike, are to be complimented on carefully submitting rare bird records: but gaps in our knowledge remain.

The Rare Breeding Birds Panel

The RBBP's composition, and role, has been shrouded by elements of mystery, sadly sometimes suspicion, despite attempts to clarify (e.g. *BTO News* 230, 2000; 242, 2003). It was formed in 1972 as an independent body to curate and report records of the rarest breeding birds in the UK. This challenging, sensitive task, involves collecting records from the whole of the United Kingdom, including Northern Ireland. The RBBP comprises a small group of experienced ornithologists (currently seven), who have steadily gained the trust of the general birdwatching community. Two of the panel are based in Scotland and make sure that Scottish interests are well represented. The Panel's work has been supported financially by the JNCC (on behalf of the country conservation agencies – EN, SNH and CCW) and the RSPB, with additional help from the BTO.

The RBBP provides a vital central 'safe house' for records of the rarest of birds breeding within the UK. These generally are those birds with populations of less than 300 pairs, though this has been stretched as some species monitored have increased in strength (e.g. Gadwall, Barn Owl, Kingfisher). The records come chiefly via our hard working County Bird Recorders. As part of their preparation of County Bird Reports, they collate any information on rare birds and send it to the Panel Secretary. These are then added to a secure database, where they are compared against any other reports relayed direct to the Secretary, to ensure that duplicates are not included. Many such records are trawled from 'Schedule One' licence forms (chiefly submitted by ringers and nest recorders), and specialist bird groups. Summaries are then written up, to appear as annual reports in *British Birds* (BB). The data are also made available to named individuals at JNCC, the Country Agencies (CCW, EN, EHS (NI), SNH) and RSPB, who can help advice other members to ensure site safeguard. The data are only provided on a 'need to know' basis, to ensure their strict security.

Within RBBP *BB* annual reports, species totals are listed by county, region or, occasionally by country. A few actual locations are given, where public viewing and wardening is available; for example, the pioneer Osprey return to England (Cumbria 2001) and Bee-eaters (Durham 2002). This procedure is followed to reduce any risk of disturbance from egg-collectors, or over-eager birdwatchers.

More recently, the RBBP has assumed a major additional strategic role, providing national population estimates for rare birds, thereby helping in the structure, formulation and deployment of recovery programmes for rare birds under threat. *The State of the UK's Birds 2001*, published jointly by RSPB, JNCC, WWT and BTO (2002), along with subsequent updated versions, have made extensive use of invaluable data supplied by the RBBP, helping to set key stone 'alerts', as part of the UK's Biodiversity Action Programme, an exciting worthy workable initiative.

Avoiding loss of irreplaceable records

Historical incidents illustrate the importance of the RBBP. Sadly, prior to the Panel's formation, details on breeding attempts in Britain by Scaup, Long-tailed Duck and Little Bittern, among others, were 'lost' to the scientific record. Secretive observers failed to relay details before their own demise. Similarly, records left as a legacy in good faith to a seemingly suitable safe 'house', such as local museums or bird clubs, have 'gone' missing - such a waste. In addition, notebooks have inadvertently been destroyed by partners, unaware of their intrinsic value. The Panel provides a secure central archive of records, so that conservationists can ensure site safety, and that unique information is never lost. Historically, sad cases have occurred, where nest sites of rare birds, including Honey Buzzard and Spotted Crake, have been accidentally destroyed, with conser-

Little Bittern (Jimmy Maxwell)

vationists unaware of their presence, or with insufficient time to make a convincing case to block any development. The RBBP provides the safe repository that should be used by all serious birdwatchers.

Monitoring 'non-native' exotic species

The RBBP has taken on a further important task since 1996, annually collecting breeding records for 'exotic' birds: mostly considered non-native. These species are often not included on the BOU British list, as having established feral populations, but they are with us breeding, apparently wild, having been introduced by man, either deliberately or by mistake. Wildfowl, gamebirds and parrots figure strongly among their ranks. Many birdwatchers consider them to be 'strange', 'oddities' and 'irrelevant', but they have great interest. The role of the Panel is to detect 'exotic' scarce species before they establish significant breeding populations, and create management and hygiene problems, as Canada Goose, Ruddy Duck and Ring-necked Parakeet have done. In recent years, records supplied by RBBP for Whooper Swan, Barnacle Goose and Red-crested Pochard, for example, have caused recorders to question their 'wild' credentials, potentially blurring any natural range extensions in the future. The recent successful breeding in the UK by Eagle Owl, Wood Duck and Lady Amherst's Pheasant, among others, could lead to competition for limited food and nest sites, or hybridization with existing species. The recent breeding attempts charted for Monks Parakeet, Alexandrine Parakeet and Blue-crowned Parakeet, for example, could have potential 'pest' implications in the future: might they spread to Scotland? Only by noting and submitting records for such 'exotic' species during one's birdwatching, can the Panel keep an eye on their overall status and flag up the needs for possible ecological research or action to limit numbers.

Non-natives such as Mandarin Duck are monitored by the Panel *(Harry Scott)*

Recent findings from RBBP reports

Scottish records figure strongly in the three most recent RBBP reports in *BB*, covering 2000-02. In 2000, the UK overall saw Bittern, Osprey, Marsh Harrier, Stone Curlew and Cetti's Warbler topping their highest level in recent times. The small, vulnerable, reintroduced Sea Eagle population topped 20 pairs, increasing slowly, despite low productivity. Wryneck was limited to just one male singing at a site in northern England, the lowest total since 1994 (absent entirely from UK the following year – though is this really true?). Fieldfare, with two pairs confirmed, the first since 1996, provided a welcome increase. In 2001, a pair of Red-necked Grebe reared a single surviving youngster in southern Scotland, the first success story since on/off nesting attempts in 1983. Encouragingly, Green Sandpiper bred for a third successive season, while Wood Sandpiper showed a welcome increase, following several poor seasons. Also in Scotland, Purple Sandpiper (single pair, possibly bred), and Temminck's Stint (lone male at one site), both cling tenaciously to their status as UK breeding birds. In 2002, Whooper Swan again bred successfully, five pairs in Scotland and the Western Isles indicative of a small regular population. A more rigorous survey of nestbox schemes in the Scottish Highlands led to a healthier than expected Goldeneye estimate of 150 egg-laying females. Numbers of breeding Slavonian Grebe and Black-necked Grebe increased again, the latter reaching an all-time modern day high level, but the number of localities fell yet again, for the

At least five pairs of Whooper Swans breed in Scotland *(Lang Stewart)*

former less than one-half that occupied in the 1990s: dangerously few. Marsh Warbler suffered the worst season in three decades and its status hangs by a thread. Redwings were noted in just 16 sites, rendering a plea for all birdwatchers, especially in Highlands, to listen for its song and submit records: a plea applicable to many other scarce passerines. Birds considered as introductions, or escapees from captivity included a pair of Rose-faced Lovebird, breeding successfully at Dunbar (Lothian) for first time in the UK. Eagle Owl, again intriguingly bred in northern England, a pair rearing two young, a sequence extending back to 1996 (with one failure). Singletons, elsewhere were reported from Highland to Norfolk, all records of this species being treasured: whether aviary escapees, or wild birds having crossed the North Sea from nearby breeding sites in Low Countries - feasible for this owl with a relatively low wing loading.

Crystal Ball gazing with Rare Birds in mind

As hinted at above, the UK's breeding bird community is likely to change ever faster, faced with more erratic weather patterns and accelerating habitat modification in our countryside. A glimpse into the future is timely. Helped, no doubt in part by global warming, Little Egret numbers have swollen greatly (since first nesting in 1996), while Spoonbill seems a likely candidate ready to take hold (breeding confirmed in 1999). Will wandering White Stork, finally settle, having a failed nesting attempt thus far (Yorkshire, 2004); erasing that over-used Bird Quiz question 'last bred St Giles Cathedral, Edinburgh in 1416'. Will Great White Egret or Cattle Egret cross from the nearby Continent and colonize? Can Scotland hold on to its relict breeding populations of Ptarmigan and Snow Bunting? Will Black Woodpecker or Scops Owl cross that water barrier formed by the North Sea to claim UK citizenship, or may pairs of increasingly irruptive Waxwing and Rose-coloured Starling linger to nest? You will have your own thoughts. Predicting is fun, but fraught with pitfalls. Given the correct ammunition, the RBBP will chart the story accurately, and with the birds' future welfare in mind.

Redwing, under-recorded breeding (Frank Stark)

Please help to create a complete archive

The Panel's reports naturally reflect the quality of information received. The RBBP has now steadily earned the respect of birdwatchers over some three decades, receiving records from virtually every county, and spanning the great majority of species. Please do your best to ensure a complete UK annual archive. Most records are forwarded to the Panel via the County Recorder system, which all serious birdwatchers should support. A list can be found in *The Birdwatchers' Yearbook*, or obtained direct from SOC HQ or BTO HQ. By sending in your records you can ensure that the UK's rare bird-life are monitored carefully and sensitively, that your hard won data are stored for posterity, and their status assessed as an aid to future conservation needs. Species forms are used (available free direct from the RBBP secretary), but records should where possible be relayed through the County Recorder or Regional Recorder.

And finally –
the Scottish connection renewed...

For many years, Malcolm Ogilvie has been RBBP Secretary, based on Islay. He has now stepped down, and his replacement is Mark Holling, former SOC President and well known to many Scottish birdwatchers. The RBBP can now be contacted by post at The Old Orchard, Grange Road, North Berwick, East Lothian EH39 4QT; email secretary@rbbp.org.uk The RBBP's website can be found at www.rbbp.org.uk.

David Glue (BTO Research Biologist)

"It's Birding Jim, but not as we know it." (Spock 3578.44)

Today's birding world seems increasingly technological and Lang Stewart offers this light-hearted vision of the future if current trends continue. We would welcome occasional short articles like this in future SBNs *- especially if they take a sideways look at the way we birdwatchers operate.*

My Satellite Navigation was flashing telling me that this was the exit for Aberlady, which was just as well as the fog hadn't lifted. It also flashed online information from SOC Waterston House that over 9,500 birds and 123 species were present in the area, which should make for a good day's birding. The 'weather view' showed that the fog should lift in the next 17-23 minutes.

At the woodland before the village, I unpacked my hyperbins and auto-scanned the area. The new Leica Mk IIs picked up 17 species around the site and I selected Bullfinch. Two seconds later the bins displayed a beautiful male Bullfinch in perfect plumage. I selected 'auto focus, tight, sharp' - and took my first picture of the day. As I arrived at Aberlady and drove along towards the golf course, the picture uploaded via the wireless link to my home site. I would review them all before I left for home.

At the car park, I set up my Leica ADIS (Automatic Digital Imaging Scope) and, as I was unpacking the rest of my gear, the scope scanned the bay, recording position, species and number of birds in the area. The overall data picked out was staggering – far-out divers with a few grebes, some Pink-feet in small groups, a host of mixed waders, ducks and several small parties of passerines. It also registered a Short-eared Owl on the golf course across the bay at a distance of 1.377 miles, just out of range for a good view or picture. I hit the menu button and rerouted my image via 'satellite enhance' mode and a crystal clear image appeared of a male in good plumage – yellow eyes glaring directly towards me. I downloaded my second image of the day – this scope was certainly a good addition to my birdwatching weaponry.

Switching the hyperbins to 'ident' menu, I scanned for rarities. The tiny screen output read: 1. Great Grey Shrike
2. Mediterranean Gull
3. Rose-coloured Starling

I selected 1. from the menu and pressed 'locate'. The bins swivelled round to pick out the distant shrike on a sprig of buckthorn. The 'ident' menu had already listed the salient features of the species, but the contrast of the black eye-mask was unexpectedly striking. As the bird moved, the Mk IIs tracked it, trying to hold focus, but the quick movements forced me to change to 'screen view' to follow the bird. When it stopped for a few seconds, I managed a grab shot, then a better quality image. The other two rarities were slightly easier by comparison and when I was happy with them, I downloaded wirelessly to my handheld pc, cropped and touched up the images and emailed them to SOC files, *Birdguides* rarities site and *Birdwatching* magazine as it was close to publication deadline.

The next few hours were spent walking back around the bay enjoying the mixed wader flocks. The alarm went off on my pocket pc to say that an adult male Surf Scoter had appeared at Musselburgh. I was there in half an hour and picked it up out at sea very quickly thanks to ADIS. As it moved into range, I took a quick shot, then switched to 'Video-Cam' to record the bird's unique swimming and diving actions. The fog was coming in again, so I packed up and headed back to the car. I realised I wouldn't be back home in time for our members' night and sent all my images from the day in presentation format directly to the laptop that was being used that evening, to allow everyone to share in what I had seen.

As I drove home, satisfied after an interesting day's photo-birding - I was reminded of that old saying "A boy (or Birder) can never have too many gadgets!" Just the same, I was looking forward, surprisingly, to our club's "non-technic" outing the following day – no gadgets allowed, just binos and notebook – great fun and wouldn't Ian Wallace be proud of us!

Lang Stewart

P.S. Since I wrote this article some 11 months ago technology, as usual, has moved on apace. Everything with the exception of the PDA was a figment of my imagination. There is now a new Bushnell scope with built-in video player/recorder, output to a PDA for easy viewing on a larger screen and even a place for the bins. Like to hazard a guess where the technology will be in another 12 months? L.S.

Climate Change and Bird Conservation

Snow Buntings may be affected by reductions in summer snow patches in Scottish mountains.
(Ian Francis)

There is strong evidence that greenhouse gas emissions from human activities are causing changes in the earth's climate. Birds, as a well-studied and popular taxonomic group, have an important role in alerting us to the environmental impacts of climate change and in encouraging people to take action to tackle the causes. Understanding and monitoring the response of birds to climate change is an important task for conservation. We must also ensure that the human response to climate change protects birds and their habitats from needless harm and makes them more resilient and better able to adapt.

Climate Change

Warnings by the International Panel on Climate Change explain how our burning of fossil fuels and emissions of other gases have exacerbated the greenhouse effect. This position is now accepted even by the major oil companies and the USA. It would be irresponsible for wildlife conservation bodies to ignore this consensus and avoid taking steps to address the threat of climate change

The Greenhouse effect is a natural process. Some of the energy from the sun is reflected from the Earth's surface, but rather than disappearing out into space, it is trapped by naturally-occurring gases in the atmosphere (e.g. water vapour and carbon dioxide). Without this effect, so much heat would be lost that the average surface temperature on Earth would be –6°C compared to the current average surface temperature of 15°C. Global warming theory explains that the increasing carbon dioxide (and other greenhouse gases) within the atmosphere traps more heat from the Sun and allows less to be radiated back out to space. As a result of this enhanced greenhouse effect, global temperature rises.

There is no argument over the fact that carbon dioxide in the atmosphere is increasing. Only around half of the 20 billion tonnes of carbon dioxide released by humans into the atmosphere is removed naturally through being absorbed into plants, soils and the sea. The rest remains in the atmosphere, for up to 150 years in the case of carbon dioxide. Over the past 100,000 years, the concentration of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere fluctuated around 200 and 270 parts per million (ppm). But in the past 200 years, levels have risen by over 40% to 380 ppm, which is probably higher than carbon dioxide levels have ever been over the past 20 million years.

There is also no disputing that temperatures are rising. Records for the northern hemisphere show warming of around 0.7°C since 1900. Ten of the hottest years on record have all occurred since 1991. Sea levels have risen by 1-2 mm per year during the 20th century, as a result of the thermal expansion of the oceans and melting of glaciers and ice shelves. In the Arctic, temperatures have risen by up to twice the global average since the 1970s. Climate models demonstrate that the natural causes of global warming, such as volcanoes, the earth's tilt and ocean currents, on their own do not explain this pattern of rapid global temperature rise. The inclusion of human factors in the model does reflect the course of global average temperature over the last 150 years.

What does climate change mean for us in the future?

Models have been developed to show possible climate change in the 21st century. If our emissions continue to rise, we could see global temperature increases of over 6°C by 2100. Climate changes predictions of a few degrees warming over the next century may seem very slight. However, the natural world is so finely tuned that these predicted changes will have wide-ranging consequences. During the last Ice Age, the average global temperature was just 5°C cooler than at present. It is widely predicted that this would have catastrophic effects on ecosystems with melting of polar ice caps, and the possibility of severe feedback loops where carbon dioxide is released from natural stores in peat bogs and the oceans. In addition to global warming, high atmospheric carbon dioxide concentrations have their own environmental impact, such as increasing plant growth rates on land and increasing the acidity of the oceans, which in turn affects marine life.

Massive species extinctions have been predicted, of perhaps a third or more of land-based plant and animal species by the 2050s, if no action is taken to limit global warming. Because our past emissions remain in the atmosphere for decades, we cannot avoid climate change even if we cut all emissions, but we can limit the extent. There is a widely held view that by significantly reducing emissions of greenhouse gases we can restrict temperature rise within 2 degrees by the end of century. This will still involve ecological change but hopefully it will be manageable.

Impacts on Scotland's Birds

Climate prediction models for the UK show that by 2050 all regions of Scotland could become 1°C warmer than in 1990. Wetter conditions are likely, particularly in autumn, and there could be more frequent heavy rainfall events as witnessed in recent floods. Wind speeds could increase and combined with sea level rise there could be more frequent storm surges on our coasts. Climate is complex and the general warming predictions will have local variations. Other complicating factors include existing cyclical weather patterns such as the North Atlantic Oscillation; a periodical shift in winter weather, which in the UK oscillates, between wet, mild winters, and cold, dry ones. The general trend in Scotland will be warmer and wetter with more frequent, extreme and unpredictable weather events.

Bird species can respond to climate change, particularly temperature and precipitation levels, through changes in distribution, survival rate, breeding success and timing of events such as migration. There has been considerable work trying to estimate how the predicted changes in climate will affect birds.

Shifting climate space

One concept being applied is that of 'climate space'. Each species of living thing occupies quite a strict geographical range, which is governed partly by the climate. It is therefore possible to define where a species currently lives according to the climate of that area and then predict the new climate space available to a species, if the climate changes. Generally, in northern Europe, as the climate warms, species will tend to shift their range northwards and to higher altitudes. Bird species in the UK have been

reported as extending their breeding ranges northward in the last few decades, possibly linked to increasing mean annual temperatures. An increase in temperature of 1°C is enough to shift populations 100 km northwards. There has been an easterly and northerly shift in the distribution of wintering waders such as Dunlin and Ringed Plover. However, it is very hard to ascribe shifts in distribution to climatic change when so many other influences exist, such as land use changes and predation.

The MONARCH project (Modelling Natural Resource Responses to Climate Change) has been set up to evaluate impacts of climate change on a broad range of species. The model uses the predicted changes in weather variables provided in UK Climate Impacts Programme (UKCIP).

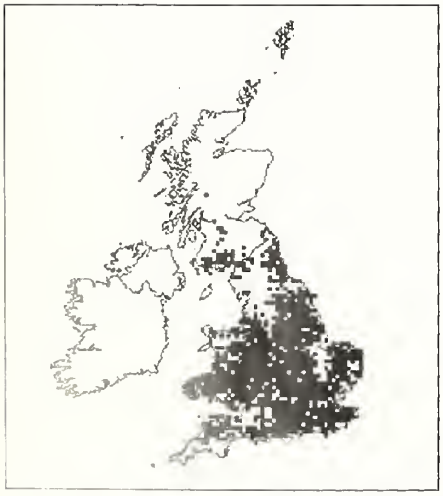
For some of Scotland's important northerly and upland species, the scenarios suggest that there will be little climate space available. The Capercaillie, Red-throated Diver and Snow Bunting are prime examples. The Capercaillie is predicted to lose 99% of its remaining climate space in Britain by the 2050s if global greenhouse gas emissions continue to rise. If we do manage to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, the models show the Capercaillie climate zone as restricted, but still present in the Highlands. Care needs to be taken in using these models as no account is taken of the availability of suitable habitat within the new climate envelopes, or of species mobility, and indeed some species may simply adapt to the new climate regime. Further work is being undertaken to refine the models to include habitat suitability. The MONARCH tool also allows some predictions to be made about other species' responses. For example, it is possible that some birds living mainly further south might shift north and spread further in Scotland, such as the Willow Tit (Figures 1 & 2). But again, habitat and other factors need to be taken into account in making these predictions.

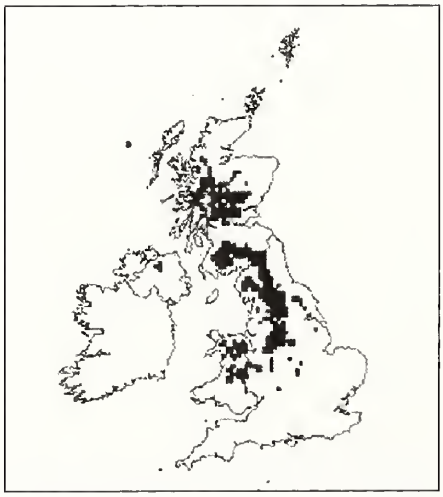
Changes in timing of events

Temperatures often act as cues to the time of year for species. Springtime is characterised by events such as emerging moths and butterflies, birds nesting and laying eggs and leaves coming out. These events are all getting earlier - roughly six days for each 1°C increase in the average annual temperature. There is great variation between species and types of species. Rising spring temperatures in recent years have led to earlier breeding for a range of bird species with the most marked changes in birds breeding at higher latitudes. Scientists from the RSPB and Newcastle and Manchester universities have found that the Golden Plover, a typical upland bird found on the moors and peat bogs of the Highlands, is breeding significantly earlier than 20 years ago. Other upland species such as Greenshank and Red Grouse could be affected in the same way.

Species will inevitably respond at different rates, with the prospect that different assemblages of species are likely to be formed, changing the balance of ecosystems. Several studies have shown a breakdown between predator and prey relationships in woodland passerines and in moorland species. For Golden Plover, research has found an increasing mismatch between the first laying date and emergence of their crane fly prey. This could mean that the earliest hatching plover chicks, which normally have the best chance of survival, could in future struggle to find food, reducing their overall breeding success and threatening the population size.

Surveys of nesting seabird colonies on the east coast of Britain have shown extensive breeding failures in recent years, particularly in Shetland and Orkney where tens of thousands of seabirds have failed to raise any young. This continues a trend seen there (especially in south Shetland) for several years, so much so that some Kittiwake colonies are beginning to disappear. Despite the fact that these birds





Figures 1 & 2. *The current distribution of Willow Tit and modelled distribution for the 2050 high temperature scenario. Source: MONARCH report 2001 - www.ukcip.org.uk*

Researchers studied 25-years' worth of data, finding that the first plover chicks now hatch on average nine days earlier than the mid-1980s, because of recent, warmer springs. (Ian Francis)

are long-lived, chronic breeding failure year-on-year spells disaster for these nationally and internationally important breeding colonies. In these Northern Isles, the failures are all the more striking for affecting a wide variety of seabirds: Arctic Terns, Kittiwakes, Guillemots, Arctic Skuas, and Great Skuas.

All of this indicates widespread food shortage, especially of sandeels, the staple diet of so many UK seabird species. While we may expect surface feeders like terns and Kittiwakes to be disadvantaged by a shortage of sandeels, it is indicative of the scale of shortage that deep-diving birds like Guillemots (which can plumb the water column down to 100 m depth) are also in trouble.

The spectacular seabird colonies on Shetland and Orkney have suffered catastrophic breeding failure, leaving sometimes empty cliffs. Due to rising sea temperatures, the plankton mix at the base of the food chain has altered radically, reducing the survival of sandeels – the staple diet of many seabirds. (Ian Francis)

There is independent evidence that sandeel productivity is being undermined by rising sea temperatures in the North Sea and – continuing down the food web – the link appears to be the 'regime shift' that has occurred in the last couple of decades in the plankton assemblage. In effect, global warming has resulted in the disappearance north of the traditional cold water plankton, to be replaced by a warmer water species whose whole annual cycle and productivity is much less supportive of larval sandeels and, as it happens, larval cod and probably other marine life too.

There is evidence that summer migrants have advanced their arrival time and for some short distance migrants, departure dates to wintering grounds have also been delayed. In some extreme cases such as the Chiffchaff, birds are remaining in the UK over winter rather than migrating south. Many migratory species could also face the effects of global warming on their breeding sites, at their stopover sites and on their wintering grounds. Changes to global weather patterns may also affect migrants that rely on regular winds to help carry them across natural barriers such as the Sahara.

Sea level rise

With rising sea levels and increased storm surge events, there could be a serious loss of intertidal habitats such as mudflats, and saltmarshes could become increasingly squeezed against existing sea defences, with increased storminess causing more erosion. As the shape of our coastline changes, the natural processes moving sediments around will also change. This will affect the invertebrate populations that are so important to waders and wildfowl. Some reports suggest that intertidal flats are likely to become sandier, improving habitat quality for species like the Oystercatcher, but reducing it for Redshank and Dunlin.

Responding to Climate Change

There is considerable consensus that we have to respond to climate change. The two main areas of activity for the UK and Scottish Governments are:

- mitigation – stabilisation of atmospheric concentrations of greenhouse gases in order to limit future climate change within manageable levels. It has been estimated that reductions of greenhouse gas emissions by at least 80% of 1990 levels are required by the end of the century, if global temperature rise is to be limited to 2°C.
- adaptation – conserving and enhancing biodiversity in the light of the inevitable impacts of climate change caused by past greenhouse gas emissions.

Climate Mitigation

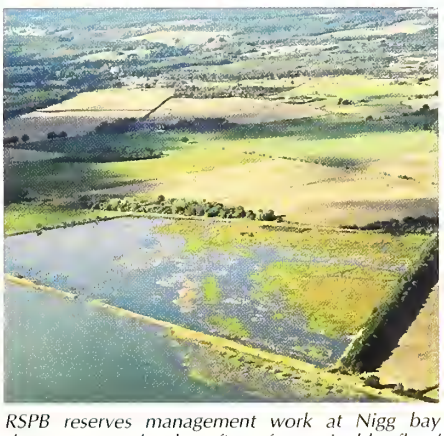
Efforts to mitigate climate change are aimed at stabilising atmospheric levels of greenhouse gases through reducing emissions, mainly from the burning of fossil fuels for energy. Helping reduce greenhouse gas emissions is seen by all major conservation bodies as essential to stop the catastrophic impacts on our environment which climate change could bring. Through campaigns such as 'Stop Climate Chaos', Governments and individuals are being made aware of the need to take action to reduce emissions.

With electricity generation as a key source of emissions, the government has introduced powerful mechanisms to encourage renewable energy such as windfarms. As with any form of major development renewable energy schemes have the potential to harm birds but the impact depends on the scale, location and design of the project (see *SBN* 72, 2004). It is entirely possible to meet necessary carbon reduction targets in the energy sector without affecting birds, by avoiding sensitive sites. Unfortunately there is insufficient strategic planning to steer development away from these sensitive areas and as a result some developers have come forward with proposals for windfarms in our most internationally important sites. Conservation bodies are working hard to encourage Government to take a more strategic approach to planning renewable energy development to avoid conflict with wildlife.

Climate adaptation

Adapting to the impact of climate change is inevitable and indeed has already begun as species respond to the changing climate. The amount of change will depend on how successful we are at reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Conservation strategies for wildlife are being developed along two broad concurrent directions: those of resilience and accommodation. The first strand is to develop the resilience of current biological interests against the impacts of climate change, for example, restoring damaged bogs to help withstand warmer and drier summers. RSPB work on Golden Plover suggests that habitat management could improve chick survival, in the face of climate change impacts described above.

Climate change will inevitably bring increasing distributional change among species, as their area of suitable climate conditions shift. Accommodation strategies will need to be developed to facilitate this movement. Habitat restoration is one option and can be targeted to provide new areas for species and habitats to relocate to. It is also important to provide connectivity in the landscape to facilitate species and habitat dispersal through improving the habitat matrix between natural habitats rather than simply creating corridors.



RSPB reserves management work at Nigg bay demonstrates the benefits of sustainable flood prevention such as managed realignment on the coast. The old sea wall has been breached to allow new coastal habitat to form behind it. (D. Munro)

Protected Areas

Climate change brings an even greater need to secure protected areas to achieve favourable conservation status and expand them to provide greater buffering. Changes may be needed to the detailed management of sites, in response to longer growing seasons or water shortages for example.

Invasive and pest species

The response of species and habitats to climate change brings new conservation problems including:

- shifting climate zones facilitating the movement of pests, disease and competing species into new areas.
- new climate conditions allowing previously suppressed species to thrive and out-compete those of conservation importance.
- Breaching of natural barriers to invasive species as the climate changes or as the result of major climate events such as storms.

Strategies will be required to monitor and respond to such changes. In many cases work to build resilience through reversing habitat degradation will reduce the risk of pests and invasive species becoming a problem.

Impacts of land use responses to climate change

Human response to climate change also brings threats to biodiversity including changing forestry, agriculture and management of water. Biodiversity considerations need to be brought into any adaptation strategies for such land uses and furthermore the benefits of biodiversity in helping ecosystems adapt should also be recognised. In tackling flooding, for example, the creation and restoration of functioning wetlands could provide a more sustainable and indeed climate-friendly response than simply building concrete structures.

In conclusion, there is much uncertainty about what climate change will bring and there will be surprises. We need to give high priority to improving our understanding of the impacts of these changes on biodiversity, tackling the causes through reducing greenhouse gases and putting in place responsible adaptation. The response to climate change must be sustainable to protect Scotland's bird life and recognise that enhancing biodiversity through conserving species and habitats is also part of the solution.

Clifton Bain, RSPB Scotland
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NOTES & COMMENT

Digiscoping - an alternative solution

Clyde SOC member, Frances Gatens has encountered many similar problems to Jimmy Maxwell (SBN 77) involving the art of digiscoping, but has developed an entirely different solution, as she writes...

My digital dilemma was centred around a Leica Televid 77 telescope with a 32x wide angle eyepiece, a dedicated adaptor and the Nikon Coolpix 4500 camera. Every time I wanted to take a photograph, I would have trouble fitting the adaptor to the camera or eyepiece and by the time I got it all sorted out, the subject had gone elsewhere. Another problem that I encountered was 'the moving target'- it seemed to me that the whole system relied upon rigidity and the moment something moved, the whole exercise was a failure. This was brought home to me whilst sailing up the Zuari River in Goa. A non-birder friend managed to produce a very good photograph of a Greater Crested Tern from the moving boat! The small SLR-like camera he was using turned out to be the Fuji Finepix S5500, which has a x10 zoom facility. I realised there and then that this could be the answer to my problems. I would be able to take good shots of birds and other wildlife without having to rely on tripods, telescope etc. I bought the Fuji and was delighted with it. I could now take shots easily from the car as opportunities appeared. This seemed all very well for subjects that were fairly close, but I would still have to rely on the telescope/camera for distant shots.

It was whilst browsing through the camera's Owners Manual that I came across information relating to a 'Teleconversion Lens'. It seemed that this small piece of equipment could give me the equivalent of a 555mm lens. It must be fitted using the Lens adaptor that comes with the camera and has a minimum focusing distance of 16.5 feet. It is not so long ago that I carried a 500mm lens with all the rest of the gear and after a day out in the field, it felt as though it weighed a ton, so I was a wee bit sceptical that the

Camera with lens *(Francis Gatens)*

Top: Berthelot's Pipit in Fuerteventura. Below: Long-tailed Shrike at distance in Goa *(Frances Gatens)*

illustration that I was looking at could outperform the large super telephoto lens. Anyway I purchased the lens and did not regret it. I now use the camera itself for close subjects and add the lens for distance, but I seldom use the telescope setup. I feel that my alternative to digiscoping and its problems has worked out very well and hope you agree that the attached photographs bear this out.

Frances Gatens

Weasel in action *(Dave Abraham)*

Caught in the act

Many birders have watched over the years as the early-nesting Long-tailed Tits have inevitably had their nests predated. So much work gathering moss, lichen and feathers only to lose the eggs or young to one of the many predators on the lookout for an easy meal. While Magpies or Squirrels are often suspected, our photo, taken with a mobile phone, shows a Weasel head and shoulders into a Long-tailed Tit's domed nest, devouring the eggs. Although of very poor quality, the photo provides useful evidence of something that occurs commonly in the spring, but is seldom witnessed.

Jimmy Maxwell

Golden Eagle diet on the Isle of Lewis

The results of the analysis carried out by Dr Mick Marquiss on the Golden Eagle pellets I collected from my designated 12-mile plot (see *SBN* 78, December 2005) have shown just how diverse the diet of these raptors is on the Isle of Lewis. The 27 pellets that were tested were gathered between August and November 2005, but it is worth mentioning that a number of these could have lain for a considerable time before I found them, so some of the items discovered in the pellets could have been consumed earlier than this period. With this in mind it would be wrong to assume that the following list of prey or carrion is eaten only during this time of year. The results below are also preliminary, and I offer some thoughts on a few of the species found.

Pellet contents	**No. of pellets**
Sheep's Wool (evident in:)	16
Vegetation debris	11
Waders *(1 Snipe, 1 Snipe/Dunlin, 1 juvenile, 3 others)*	6
Greylag Goose	5
Rabbit	4
Red Grouse	2
Redwing	2
Hare	1
Hedgehog	1
Mink	1
Gull	1
Shag or Cormorant	1

A selection of Golden Eagle pellets *(Frank Stark)*

Dr Marquiss has pointed out, "Pellets reflect diet but there is a strong bias towards hair, and towards large animals. Thus the high proportion of pellets with wool does not mean that a similar percentage of the diet was sheep or lamb. Eating carrion sheep would leave eagles

To be honest, this nesting in Scotland has its good points - plenty of lovely green, midge-enriched grass, no wear and tear on the trip to Iceland, and no Asian 'Flu' - well almost.....!

with lots of wool in their crop". Greylag Geese and Rabbits, both consummate grazers, are high on the list of the Golden Eagles' preferred prey and are regarded by most crofters or farmers as unwanted pests. They devour the grass at an alarming rate that would otherwise be eaten by livestock and multiply just as quickly. Because of their rapidly increasing numbers, geese in particular have been identified as a major threat to sheep and cattle owners. One farmer I spoke to shoots geese on a regular basis in an effort to control their numbers but even he has admitted that he is fighting a losing battle. The news that Canada Geese may be breeding here and could possibly join the swelling population of Greylags will be of little comfort.

Golden Eagle hunting *(Frank Stark)*

There are still some crofters, who ritually and traditionally persecute Golden Eagles either directly or indirectly, but by destroying what they perceive as their nemesis, perhaps they are instead getting rid of an important and natural ally. Yes, some Golden Eagles will kill the odd lamb; there is no point in continually denying this fact. However, there is evidence to suggest that when this does happen, the lambs that are taken are weaklings from poorly managed stock. I happened to meet a crofter in the neighbouring village gathering his stock at lambing time and asked him if he had spotted any eagles in the area recently. He quite bluntly replied that if he had, he would not tell me, or anyone else for that matter. When I asked why not, he went on to explain, " There are certain people who "interfere" with these birds if they find them and it is not the sort of action I approve of". After I assured him I had no such intentions, he continued, "Eagles generally tend to avoid people and although I have watched them out on the moor, I have seldom found them hunting close to the village where my lambs were born. When the lambs are eventually allowed onto the moor, they are usually too large and healthy for Golden Eagles to kill".

Crows and Black-backed Gulls were his main foe - two birds that are killed regularly by eagles and it was encouraging to note that the crofter I spoke to was well aware of this fact. Mink and Hedgehog, two alien species that are costing millions of pounds to eradicate, are also eaten, and so in conclusion, it seems that the Golden Eagles on Lewis are more beneficial than some may think.

I have now cleared all the pellets from the Golden Eagle roosts, perches and dumps that I know of in this area. By visiting these places regularly and dating the pellets as they are found, a pattern should gradually emerge, showing not only the diet of these magnificent raptors but also just as importantly, the specific diet at any given time of the year.

Frank Stark
frank482@btinternet.com

Caption Competition

Provide a caption for the bird picture of Tufted Ducks below right and have a chance of winning an SOC hat. Each *SBN* edition will feature a new photo. The winner and other best captions will be shown in *SBN* 81. Send your single caption by E-mail to: jimmy.maxwell @virgin.net (or of course by mail to the SOC – see Page 3)

The winning Caption from *SBN* 79 (see White Stork photo) came from Hugh and Sarah Macdonald with: "Well, the baby was up there a minute ago" Well done! Others: "I know he gave me his business card, where in heaven's name did I put it?"- Michael Thomas. "It's butter!" – Peter Gordon.

Male Nuthatch *(Lang Stewart)*

Nuthatch Update

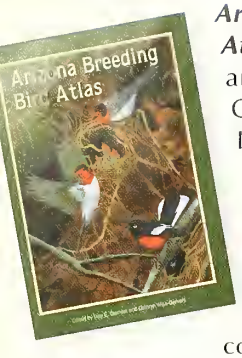
After last year's successful breeding of Nuthatches in Dalzell Woods, when the pair fledged 4/5 young, things are looking good once again. At the moment in mid-April, the female Nuthatch is busy bringing in bark and leaves for the nest while the male (now ringed red/white) defends the territory and entertains everyone with his loud ringing calls. A feeding programme throughout the winter was designed to keep us in touch with the young birds – unfortunately most have now dispersed elsewhere and only one extra bird was seen around in January/ February – so far no other breeding activity has been observed. We now look forward to a successful season with hundreds of visitors coming to see Lanarkshire's only breeding pair in action.

Jimmy Maxwell

White Stork *(Eric McCabe)*

Tufted Ducks *(Stewart Love)*

BOOK REVIEWS



Arizona Breeding Bird Atlas Troy E. Corman and Cathryn Wise-Gervaise 636pp. ISBN 0-8263-3379-6

This weighty volume admirably brings together a mass of information and data to provide a comprehensive picture of Arizona's breeding birds.

The distribution maps for each species are large and clear and supported by ample habitat, breeding and location paragraphs, with helpful highlighted introductory facts.
If intending to visit this superb area, you will not include this Atlas in your baggage but a pre-holiday perusal is strongly recommended. The book, generously donated by Josh Burns, is available in the SOC Library at Waterston House.

Keith Macgregor

Naturalised Birds of the World Christopher Lever ISBN 0-7136-7006-1 Poyser, £40.

This book updates an earlier version by the same author published by Longman in 1987, of which the Waterston library does not hold a copy. Sir Christopher has specialised in the subject: as the comprehensive reference list in this book shows; he has published numerous articles and books on naturalised animals, including birds and fishes, notably the notorious case of the Cane Toad. In comparison with the earlier volume, he has omitted reintroduced birds (e.g. White-tailed Eagle) from consideration.

It is not surprising, in view of the author's expertise, that the book is extremely comprehensive, covering a very wide range of birds introduced by man to virtually every part of the world, whether as predators, ornamental species, from nostalgia, or for any other reason. There is one message that comes across extremely clearly: if you are thinking of introducing a bird to an alien environment, don't! Only two introductions are described as being wholly beneficial: Little Owl to England and Dunnock to New Zealand: even species apparently unlikely to cause problems (e.g. Goldfinch) can in fact do so. It is a particularly bad idea to introduce a predator even in an attempt to control some other mistaken introduction, as it will certainly find an easier living from endemic species. There are copious examples of what can go wrong. However Sir Christopher does not approve of trying to undo an error of introduction by culling, after the manner of the current campaign against the Ruddy Duck.

I detected a few minor but irritating editing errors, and the book is not cheap, but it can fairly claim to be the last word on the subject for some time to come.

John Davies

Collins eGuide The Medion MD200 Pocket PC. 2003, 64MB RAM, 400MHz Intel XScale Processor, SDIO Compatible SD/MMC Slot, Removable battery, 240 x 320 pixels (65,000 Colour screen), Size 124 x 72 x 15mm.

Hailed at its launch at the British Birdwatching Fair as the "next big thing for birding", the eguide brings gadgetry to birders in the field. It is a software programme that can be displayed on a PDA (Personal Digital Assistant) screen (5x7 cm), which makes it easy to carry and use. The programme is loaded on to an SD memory card which slots into the PDA (e.g. using satnav - see picture) allowing pages to be viewed, just like reading a book.

Collins e-guide

Satnav e-guide

A PDA is a handheld device that synchronizes with your pc and holds all your address and calendar information. It also has evolved to include mobile phone and GPS technology. My PDA measures 4.25" x 2.25" and fits easily in the pocket of my Birdwatching jacket. The memory slot at the top allows me to load in the map information for the UK or whichever country I am in. To use another programme, e.g. a birdwatching one, I would simply replace the SD memory card holding the map information with the one containing the birding information, field guide etc.

The first programme to be released is ***The Collins Field Guide*** the definitive book for birdwatchers in the field. The eguide (see picture below) not only allows you to check what the bird looks like but also allows search of species or basic families of birds. However the biggest advantage is that it contains the sounds of over 450 birds.

On the downside is the price. Expensive at £89.95 from WildSounds (www.wildsounds.com or www.futureof-

birding.com), the software is loaded on to an SD memory card - but if you need to purchase a PDA as well, you can add another £250 – £400. This compares with £16.99 for the paperback field guide – technology comes at a price! However the technological 21st century has arrived in the birder's world as the PDA can combine mobile telephone, satellite navigation, email, diary, internet and photo album. It will also store and play music and who knows what else it will do in the future?

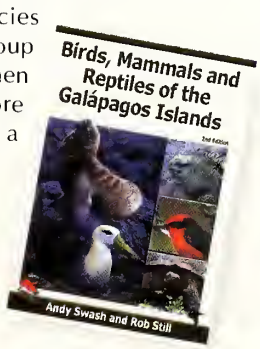
Lang Stewart

Birds, Mammals and Reptiles of the Galapagos Islands, an Identification Guide (2nd Edition) by Andy Swash and Rob Still with illustrations by Ian Lewington c2005 (Orig. pub.by Pica Press) Helm isbn 0 – 7136 – 7551 – 9 Paperback, £16.99.

I was delighted to be asked to review this book as I had used the first edition on my trip to the Galapagos Islands a couple of years ago.

The introduction and accompanying chapters are a "must read" for all visitors to these islands as they tell the reader all about the islands, - climate, geography, habitats, weather and topography. With good maps, photographs and diagrams, it has an easy-to-follow text. The two authors are very passionate about the islands and obviously know them well.

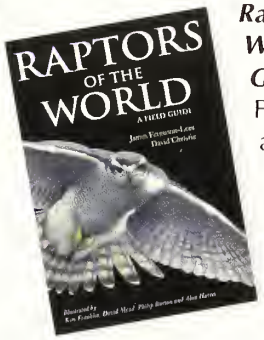
The largest section of the book is devoted to birds as there are more of these than reptiles and mammals. Before looking at the species one by one, it explains, with excellent photographic illustrations, the terminology used in the text, identification pointers and naming all the relevant parts of the birds needed to identify them. It also explains plumage – (terms such as adult, juvenile, first winter etc) - which can be very confusing for most of us. The birds are then classified into categories, such as seabirds. There is a table of all groups in each category, showing their status (resident, vagrant etc), whether they are endemic and the number of species recorded. Each group (e.g. boobies) is then described in more detail, with a photograph.



Next come the wonderful bird plates, all photographs bar a couple. There is a page explaining the annotations used on the plates and the maps. I found the texts and photos easy to follow for identification, although the birds in flight may not always necessarily be directly above one! The reptiles and mammals are similarly described and illustrated.

The in-depth text by Andy Swash, with up-to-date information about the status of the wildlife on the islands, make this a wonderful book, and complemented with the superb photographs of Rob Still, this is definitely a great guide to take with you if you ever have the chance to visit the Galapagos Islands. It is also small enough to fit into your back pack along with your essential water, binoculars and camera!

Janet Crummy



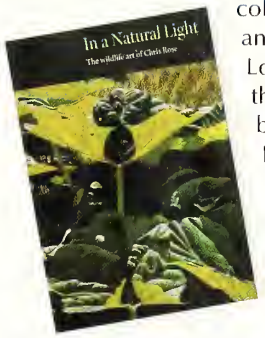
Raptors of the World - A field Guide, by James Ferguson-Lees and David Christie. Illustrated by Kim Franklin, David Mead, Philip Burton and Alan Harris. ISBN 0 7136 69578 8 £19.99 paperback.

This is a condensed and updated version of the 2001 "*Raptors of the World*", reviewed in *Scottish Bird News* 64, June 2002.

In a Natural Light – The Wildlife Art of Chris Rose Langford Press (2005) ISBN 1 904078 16 8 £35 (also available at SOC, Waterston House).

This is a lavishly illustrated and well written first book with a foreword by Robert Gillmor. The theme of the book is birds through the seasons, starting and ending in the winter. He concentrates on Scottish birds, particularly those seen in the Scottish Borders, writing about each painting and the inspiration behind it. Chris is clearly passionate about his work and his love of his subjects shows in his attention to detail. His introduction to the book is almost a masterclass in painting.

I particularly liked 'The Autumn Plovers', showing the various stages of moult, their plumages complemented by the colours of the wrack and rocks; and 'The Log Pile', in which the Wren is dwarfed by the split wood. His skill in catching the nuances of light and shade and water makes his paintings come alive.



Jean Torrance

Collins Gem Scottish Birds - The quick and easy spotters guide, by Valerie Thom (First published as *Collins Scottish Birds* 1994, Gem edition 2006) , Harper Collins ISBN 0 00 720769 7 £4.99

The cover notes state "The book describes and illustrates over 180 species of bird that you are most likely to find in Scotland. Maps show where you can spot each bird, with details about the best time of year to find it. Details of habitat, nest and behaviour are given for each species." This compact volume would make a handy reference book for your top pocket.

The SOC needs BOOKS !!

The Book Fair was held at Waterston House on 22nd April, the Club selling c£800 worth of books, many of which had been donated by members and members' friends and relatives. If you know of any ornithological works which are no longer in use, for whatever reason, do consider suggesting that they could be donated to the SOC. They might be used to expand our already considerable collection or be offered for sale, contributing towards facilities and events at Waterston House or to the huge variety of SOC activities.

The success of the Book Fair is likely to mean that this will become an annual event, so there is plenty of time before next April to arrange for books to be delivered there and make a real contribution to our funds. Many thanks to all those who have already donated books in this way.

RECENT REPORTS

A review of spring 2006

An exciting period as always, though as in recent springs in Scotland, only low numbers of common and scarce migrants were recorded. In fact the only true fall of the spring occurred at the end of March and beginning of April when large numbers of thrushes and finches were recorded, including spring record counts of 1,500 **Song Thrushes** and 26 **Mistle Thrushes** on Fair Isle, both on 26th March. There was also a spring record count of 144 **Woodpigeons** there on 28th March, whilst elsewhere in the same period, a **Stock Dove** on Lewis at Barvas on 26th March is only the 10th record for the Outer Hebrides, the first for Lewis and first since 1998. Also in this late March/early April fall, scarcities included single **Firecrests** at Foveran Bushes on 31st March and Girdle Ness on 1st April (both North-East Scotland), a **Little Bunting** at Newark Bay on 27th March (first spring record for Orkney), a **Black-bellied Dipper** on Fair Isle on 26th-31st March, 10+ migrant **Hawfinches** mostly on the Northern Isles and 50+ **Black Redstarts**.

Whilst not producing the same quantity of migrants, the first fortnight in May certainly produced the quality. The highlight for many was the **Calandra Lark** present on the Isle of May on 12th-15th May, the sixth for Scotland and only the 12th record for Britain. The same weekend also saw the discovery of a **Great Reed Warbler** at Forfar Loch on 13th-15th (second record for Angus), whilst the previous weekend saw a first for Scotland in the shape of an **Iberian Chiffchaff** in Lothian at Pitcox, then Pressmennan Lake on 5th-11th. The main identification clincher for this species is the song, and sonograms of recordings of the Lothian bird's song perfectly match other sonograms of Iberian Chiffchaff. This was not the only major rarity to be relocated this spring (Pressmennan Lake being one-and-a quarter miles to the west of Pitcox), with [illegible] **American Robin** on Speyside being found and photographed at two different locations around 4 miles apart: initially by Loch Morlich on the 4th May and then at Auchgourish Gardens near Boat of Garten on the 6th. Shetland laid claim to most of the other main rarities seen this May, with a male **Collared Flycatcher** at Brow Marsh on 9th-10th, two different **Scops Owls**: at Swining on 10th and Fair Isle on 16th , and a **White-throated Sparrow** at Sumburgh on 13th then relocated at Quendale the next day. Single **Red-throated Pipits** were on Fair Isle on 11th-16th May and Foula on 26th May-2nd June and a **Savi's Warbler** at Skaw, Unst on 28th May-3rd June – the 9th Shetland record and only the 10th for Scotland – the only other record being a singing bird at the Tay Reedbeds (Perth & Kinross) last May.

Also in May on Shetland, a male **Caucasian Stonechat** was at Virkie on 7th – only the second British record of this Eastern form, '*variegata*'. Three different **Subalpine Warblers** were seen on Shetland between the 7th-8th May with others on the Isle of May on 8th-9th May and North Ronaldsay (Orkney) on 11th. Also in May, single **Red-rumped Swallows** were at Baltasound, Unst (Shetland) on 6th and Old Rattray Farm (North-East Scotland) on 23rd, **Bee-eaters** were reported on Stronsay (Orkney) on 6th and over Maywick (Shetland) on 24th, and three different **Short-toed Larks** were seen on Fair Isle between 6th-31st. Two different male **Ortolan Buntings** were also there in May, on 8th-15th and 24th-26th (the only ones reported from anywhere in Britain this spring) and a male **Woodchat Shrike** was on North Ronaldsay on 6th. On Shetland, single **Nightingales** were on Whalsay on 10th and Fetlar on 13th and a male **Red-breasted Flycatcher** was on Out Skerries on 12th whilst a 1st-summer **Rose-coloured Starling** was taken by a cat on Iona (Argyll) on 14th with another reported at Forsinard (Highland) on 21st. Six **Hoopoes** were reported between 24th Apr-12th May from Shetland, Highland, Ayrshire, Lothian, Borders and North-East Scotland. Three **Shore Larks** were on Fair Isle on 24th Apr with, in May, singles seen in the first week on Noss (Shetland) and North Ronaldsay while two were in North-East Scotland: at Girdle Ness on 6th-9th and St. Combs on 12th. Only five **Wrynecks** were reported this spring, all on Shetland and all between 5th-18th May, whilst other scarcities also had similar poor showings with 23 **Bluethroats** all on the Northern Isles from the 7th May, including counts of 6 on Fair Isle on 8th and 11th, only two **Icterine Warblers**: at Ramsdale Quarry (Orkney) on 16th May and Fair Isle on the 19th, only two **Golden Orioles**: at Musselburgh Lagoons (Lothian) on 11th May and Cunningsburgh (Shetland) on 26th-31st, only four **Common Rosefinches**, all on Shetland from the 20th May and only 11 **Red-backed Shrikes** from the 8th May again all on the Northern Isles.

In April, five **Arctic Redpolls** were reported, all probably of the form '*hornemanni*', two on Lewis on 14th, two on Unst on 29th-30th and one on the Isle of Eigg (Highland) on 23rd with the popular over-wintering bird of the form '*exilipes*' present at Aberlady Bay (Lothian) until the 18th Mar at least. Up to 600 **Waxwings** were reported from around Scotland in March, still with up

Savi's Warbler, Unst, Shetland *(Micky Maher)*

to 300 in April and in May three singles on Shetland on the 8th being the last reported. Around 16 **Turtle Doves** were reported from the 4th May at widely scattered locations, including three in Argyll and three on the Outer Hebrides.

Up to four **Spoonbills** were seen: at Aberlady/Tyninghame and Musselburgh Lagoons (Lothian) between 5th-10th May, on the Ythan Estuary (North-East Scotland) on 6th May, at WWT Caerlaverock (Dumfries & Galloway) on 29th May and over Meikle Loch (North-East Scotland) on 1st June. Presumably only one wandering **Black Stork** was responsible for three sightings in May: over near Kiltarlity (Highland) on 9th, over North Ronaldsay (Orkney) on 10th and over Aberlour area (Moray & Nairn) on 13th. Three **Bitterns** were seen in March, two different on Shetland from the 26th and one at Loch Leven (Perth & Kinross) on 18th. Up to six **Little Egrets** were reported in May and seven **Common Cranes** from 30th March. A **Purple Heron** was reported from Broadwood Loch (North Lanarkshire) on 10th May and also two **Night Herons**: at Logan Botanic Gardens (Dumfries & Galloway) on 13th March and at Bridge of Allan (Upper Forth) on 21st May – presumably both genuine migrants as the free-flying Edinburgh Zoo birds, the source of most of the Scottish records over the last 20 years, are no more.

Six **Quails** were reported from the 1st May, whilst amongst raptors, there was a good selection of rare and scarce species reported. A very early **Hobby** was seen and photographed near Aviemore (Highland) on 17th Apr with seven further birds reported in May, four of them in North-East Scotland. A ringtail **Montagu's Harrier** flew through at Aberlady Bay (Lothian) on 9th May, three migrant **Honey Buzzards** were reported from the 16th, two in Lothian and one in North-East Scotland, a white morph **Gyr Falcon** was on South Ronaldsay (Orkney) on 23rd May whilst three **Rough-legged Buzzards** were reported in the period from Shetland, as well as one from Orkney. The most bizarre raptor record of the period though is the dark morph **Rough-legged Hawk** (north American race of Rough-legged Buzzard) on Mainland Shetland in the Lerwick area from 5th May. It was a bird that was released off a ferry between the Faeroe Islands and Denmark, having been in captivity on the Faeroes since 2003! It had been initially caught on a fishing boat off Newfoundland, Canada in Sept 2003.

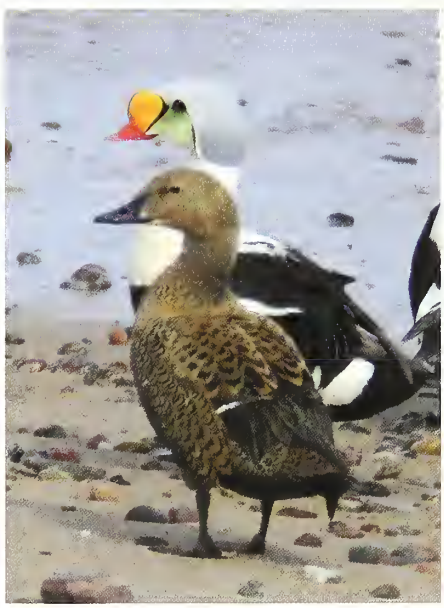
A **Snowy Owl** was occasionally seen on the Outer Hebrides during the period, still on North Uist in mid-May at least, whilst also on the Outer Hebrides, an

Turtle Dove, Shetland *(Dougie Preston)*

adult **Black-browed Albatross** was, for at least its second summer, in the gannetry on Sula Sgeir from the 23rd May at least. It is presumably the bird first seen as a sub adult in sea area Rockall in 2001. A **Brunnich's Guillemot** was found dead on Yell (Shetland) on 4th May – a more typical record after last winter's long-staying live bird on Shetland. Yet again, a significant passage of **White-billed Divers** was noted this spring, with the north coast of Lewis again the main site. At least eight different birds were seen off here from the 23rd March, with another 10 elsewhere in Scotland during April and early May with four on Shetland, two in Highland, two different birds off North Ronaldsay (Orkney), one off Harris (Outer Hebrides) and one from a boat two miles north-west of Corsewall Point (Dumfries & Galloway) on 24th Apr.

Amongst wildfowl in a good showing, a drake **Hooded Merganser** was at Loch of Cliff and Haroldswick, Unst (Shetland) on 15th Apr-2nd May, a female **Blue-winged Teal** was at Brodgar pools (Orkney) on at least 3rd May, six **Ring-necked Ducks**, all drakes, were seen in April, May and early June, five drake **American Wigeons** were seen in April, seven drake **Green-winged Teals** were

Hooded Merganser, Shetland *(Dougie Preston)*



King Eiders at Blackdog *(Andy Webb)*

reported in April and May and at least nine **King Eiders** were noted including a drake and a female together at Dales Voe (Shetland) in April and a drake and a female together at Blackdog (North-East Scotland) on 27th May. After an early pair of **Garganey** at Baron's Haugh RSPB (Lanarkshire) on 19th March, only two were seen in April, but then a good influx in May with up to 65 seen including seven at RSPB Gruinart, Islay (Argyll) on 10th.

The wintering adult **Laughing Gulls** remained at Ardrossan (Ayrshire) until 15th March and Campbeltown (Argyll) until 15th Apr at least, with in May an adult reported at Holm on 18th (only 3rd Orkney record if accepted) and in June an adult summer was in Stornoway, Lewis (Outer Hebrides) on 3rd. Only two **Ring-billed Gulls** were reported in April, at Oban (Argyll) still and Dingwall (Highland). It was the most extraordinary

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Pomarine Skuas off North Uist *(Mark Darlaston)*

Long-tailed Skua off North Uist *(Mark Darlaston)*

skua passage this May, especially **Long-tailed Skua**, with an unprecedented overland passage noted at Saltcoats (Ayrshire) with a flock of 53 birds heading inland over the harbour there on the evening of the 23rd and then the next day 173 birds inland over including single flocks of 80 and 42. To put this in perspective, there were only 12 accepted Ayrshire records of Long-tailed Skua up to the end of 2004. Elsewhere in May, 38 Long-tailed Skuas flew over the Churchill Barriers (Orkney) on 22nd, 38 flew over Blackdog (North-East Scotland) on 26th and 54 were off Corsewall Point (Dumfries & Galloway) on 27th. On the Outer Hebrides from the 8th 477 birds were reported, with many records away from the traditional Aird an Runair headland watchpoint on North Uist, including 163 past Mangurstadh, Lewis on the 22nd. A total of 853 **Pomarine Skuas** were logged passing the Aird an Runair headland between 13th Apr-28th May, including a count of 558 birds on the 19th. Also on the 19th May in Highland, 83 passed Chanonry Point and 128 flew north in 2 hours in the evening over Loch Eye.

By recent standards it was a poor spring for North American waders with the only records a **Long-billed Dowitcher** on North Uist at Aird an Runair on 9th May, a **Buff-breasted Sandpiper** at Tyninghame, then Aberlady (Lothian) on 4th-13th May and a **Pectoral Sandpiper** at Hillwell (Shetland) on 29th-31st. A summer-plumaged female **Grey Phalarope** was off North Rona (Outer Hebrides) on 23rd May, the same day as the first **Red-necked Phalarope** was seen back on Fetlar (Shetland). The first **Dotterels** were seen on the 23rd Apr on the Outer Hebrides, with 25 at St. Combs (North-East Scotland) on 12th May the largest reported trip. 17 **Wood sandpipers** were reported from the 26th Apr, whilst the only **Temminck's Stint** was at Murton GPS (Angus) on 4th June. In April, five **Avocets** were at Skinflats (Upper Forth) on the 20th and two were at RSPB Loch of Strathbeg on 20th-22nd with also in North-East Scotland, one at the Donmouth on 3rd May, with presumably the same then on the Ythan Estuary on 5th-10th. In June, a **Black-winged Stilt** was reported flying north calling near St. Monans (Fife) on the 3rd. There are only around 10 Scottish records of Black-winged Stilt and the last was in 1990.

Angus Murray

ISBN 0268-3199

Scottish Bird News

Scottish Bird News is the magazine of the SOC. It acts as a channel of communication for SOC members and disseminates information relevant to Scotland's birdlife. It is published four times a year in March, June, September and December. Articles and notices are welcomed and should be sent to the Editors at the address below no later than five weeks before publication. The views expressed are not necessarily the policy of the SOC. Contributors should note that material has to be edited, often at short notice, and it is not practical to let authors see these changes in advance of publication.

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The Scottish Ornithologists' Club (SOC) was established by a group of Scottish ornithologists who met together in the rooms of the Royal Scottish Geographical Society in Edinburgh on 24th March 1936.

The Club now has 2200 members and 14 branches around Scotland. It plays a central role in Scottish birdwatching, bringing together amateur birdwatchers, keen birders and research ornithologists with the aims of documenting, studying and, not least, enjoying Scotland's varied birdlife. Above all, the SOC is a club, relying heavily on keen volunteers and the support of its membership.

Headquarters provide central publications and an annual conference, and houses the Waterston Library, the most comprehensive library of bird literature in Scotland. The network of branches, which meet in Aberdeen, Ayr, the Borders, Dumfries, Dundee, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Inverness, New Galloway, Orkney, St Andrews, Stirling, Stranraer and Thurso, organise field meetings, a winter programme of talks and social events.

The SOC also supports the Local Recorders' Network and the Scottish Birds Records Committee. The latter maintains the 'official' Scottish List on behalf of the Club. The Club supports research and survey work through its Research Grants.

The Club maintains a regularly-updated web site, which not only contains much information about the Club, but is also the key source of information about birds and birdwatching in Scotland. SOC is a registered Scottish charity (no SCO 009859).

www.the-soc.org.uk

***Passwords to access members' web pages on the new SOC web site:
'sandwich & 'tern'***